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THE ODD WOMEN

IN THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

EVE'S RANSOM

HUMAN ODDS AND ENDS

STORIES AND SKETCHES

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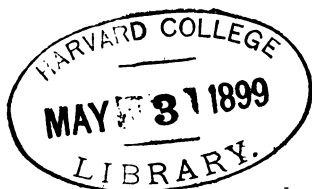
LONDON

LAWRENCE AND BULLEN, LTD.

16 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN

1898

21478.16.6



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PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
LONDON

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COMRADES IN ARMS

LUNCHEON hour was past, and the tide of guests had begun to ebb. From his cushioned corner, his familiar seat in the restaurant, Wilfrid Langley kept an observant eye upon chatting groups and silent solitaries who still lingered at the tables near him. In this quiet half-hour, whilst smoking a cigarette and enjoying his modest claret, he caught the flitting suggestion of many a story, sketch, gossipy paper. A woman's laugh, a man's surly visage, couples oddly assorted, scraps of dialogue heard amid the confused noises—everywhere the elements of drama, to be fused and minted in his brain. Success had multiplied his powers a hundredfold; success and the comforts that came with it—savoury meats, wine, companionship. No one was dependent upon him; no one restrained his liberty; he lived where he chose, and how he chose. And for all that—his age fell short of thirty—something seemed to him amiss in the bounty of the gods.

A figure was moving in his direction; he looked up from a moment's reverie, to see a woman seat

herself at the opposite side of his table. A laugh of pleased recognition ; a clasp of hands.

'Thought I might find you here,' said Miss Childerstone. She turned to the waiter. 'Roast mutton—potatoes—bread. And—soda-water.'

'Soda !' Langley exclaimed in surprise. 'That's where you women make a mistake. You need a stimulant.'

'Thanks, old man ; I am better acquainted with my needs than you are. Here's something for you.'

She threw an evening paper at him saying, 'Page seven.' Langley opened it, and his eyes sparkled with pleasure. A notice of his new book ; three-quarters of a column ; high laudation, as he saw immediately.

'Yours ?' he asked.

'Take it without questions, and be thankful you're not slated.'

'It *is* yours. Don't I know the fine Roman hand ? Irony in the first sentence.' He read in silence for a few minutes, then gave his companion a look of warm gratitude. 'You're a good sort.'

Miss Childerstone was drinking deep of her soda-water. Neither plain nor pretty, she had noticeable features, a keen good-humoured eye, an air of self-possession and alertness. She dressed well, with a view to the fitness of things. Her years were in the fourth decade.

She began to eat, but, it seemed, with little appetite.

'I've had a headache since yesterday. I should like to go to bed and lie there for a week. But there's my stuff for Tomlinson. Don't feel like it, I tell you.'

'I see now that you look out of sorts. Yes, you look bad. I tell you what—couldn't I scrawl something that would do for Tomlinson?'

She looked at him, and smiled.

'I dare say you could. Any rubbish you want to shoot somewhere. The truth is, I don't think I'm equal to it.—No, I can't eat. Thump! thump! on the back of the head.'

They discussed the literary business in question, and Langley undertook to supply the article due from his friend to a weekly paper. It must be posted to-night. Miss Childerstone, abandoning the scarcely touched food, rested her head upon her hands for a few moments.

'I've done something I'm proud of,' she said at length, 'and I may as well have the satisfaction of telling you. My sister has just gone off to Natal, to be married there. I provided her outfit, paid her passage, and gave her fifty pounds. All off my own bat, old boy! Not bad, is it?'

'Your sister? Why, you never told me she was going to be married.'

'No. It wasn't quite certain—all along. Two

years ago she engaged herself to a man who was going out yonder—a man of no means, and not quite up to her mark, I thought. (I must eat something ; I'll try the potatoes.) A very decent sort of fellow—handsome, honest. Well, she's been in doubt, off and on. (Are these potatoes bad? Or is it my taste that's out of order?) She stuck to her teaching, poor girl, and had a pretty dull time of it. In the end, I made up my mind that she'd better go and get married. There couldn't be any doubt about the man's making her a good husband ; I read his letters, and liked them. Good, plodding, soft-hearted sort of creature ; not at all a bad husband for Cissy. Better than the beastly teaching, anyway. So she's gone.'

'That's a disappointment to me,' said Langley. 'I hoped to meet her some day. And you promised I should.'

'Yes—but I altered my mind.'

'What do you mean? You didn't wish me to meet her?'

'The probability was you'd have unsettled her. She never knew a man of your sort. She might have fallen in love with you.'

Miss Childerstone spoke in a matter-of-fact voice ; her smile could not have been less ambiguous. Langley, gazing at her with surprise, exclaimed at length :

'Well? And why not?'

'Why not? Oh, my dear boy, I would do a good deal for you, but I couldn't indulge your vanity in that direction. I'm fond of my little sister.'

'Of course you are. And why shouldn't I have been? Describe her to me.'

'Fair — pretty — five-and-twenty. An old-fashioned girl, with all sorts of beliefs that would exasperate you. The gentlest creature! Vastly too patient, too good. Will make an ideal housewife and mother.'

Langley smote the table with his fist.

'But you're describing the very girl I want to find, and can't! How absurdly you have behaved! And she's gone to the end of the earth to marry a man she doesn't care about—this is too ridiculous! Why, I want to marry, and the difficulty is to find such a girl as this. I shall never forgive you.'

His companion looked searchingly at him, with mocking lips.

'Bosh!' she replied.

'It isn't! I'm desperately serious.'

'In any case, I wouldn't have let her marry you. You've been too frank with me. I know you too well. Of course, I like you, because you're likeable—as a comrade-in-arms. We've fought the battle together, and done each other a good turn now and then. But you're very young, you know. You have money in your pocket for the first time, and—by-t

bye, I heard about that supper at Romano's. How much did it cost you ?'

'Oh, ten or fifteen pounds—I've forgotten.'

He said it with a touch of bravado, his smile betraying pleasure that the exploit had become known.

'Precisely. And your Dulcinea of the footlights—Totty, Lotty—what's her name?—was there. My dear boy, you mustn't marry for another ten years. It would spoil you. You're only just beginning to look round the world. Go ahead ; enjoy yourself ; see things ; but don't think of marrying.'

'I think of it perpetually.'

The other moved an impatient hand.

'I can't talk. My head is terrible. I must go home.'

'You've been working yourself to death to provide for your sister. And very likely made her miserable, after all.'

'Mind your own business. Where's the waiter ? Call him, will you ? I'm turning blind and deaf, and I don't know what.'

'I shall take you home,' said Langley, rising.

'You can put me into a cab, if you like.'

She looked very ill, and Langley kept glancing at her with uneasiness as they went together from the restaurant. His resolve to see her safely home was not opposed. In the hansom they exchanged few words, but Langley repeated his promise to do the

bit of literary work for her editor. 'To-morrow morning,' he added, 'I shall come and ask how you are. Send for a doctor if you're no better by night.'

His own rooms were in the same district, that of Regent's Park, and after leaving Miss Childerstone he went off to perform the task he had undertaken—no difficult matter. Though it was holiday time with him just now, he spent the whole evening in solitude, more discontented than usual. The post brought him news that the first edition of his book was sold out. Satisfactory, but it gave him no particular delight. He had grown used to think of himself as one of the young men whom the public run after, and his rooted contempt for the public made him suspicious of his own merits. Was he not becoming vulgarised, even personally? That supper the other night, in honour of the third-rate actress, when every one got more or less drunk—pah! These dreary lodgings, which no expenditure could make homelike. A home—that was what he wanted. Confound Miss Childerstone! That sister of hers, now steaming away to Natal——

At twelve o'clock next day he called on his friend, and was asked to wait in her sitting-room. He had been here only once or twice; to-day the room seemed more uncomfortable than on former occasions, and Langley wondered how a woman could live amid such surroundings. But was Miss Childerstone to be judged as a woman? For seven or eight years

she had battled in the world of journalism, and with a kind of success which seemed to argue manlike qualities. Since he had known her, these last three years, she seemed to have been growing less feminine. At first he had thought of her with the special interest which arises from difference of sex ; now he rarely, if ever, did so. He liked her, admired her, and could imagine her, in more natural circumstances, a charming woman. If, as was probable, her sister resembled her in all the good points——

She came in, and her appearance startled him. She wore a dressing-gown ; her hair was tossed into some sort of order ; illness unmistakable blanched her face. Without offering to shake hands, she tumbled on to the nearest chair.

‘Why on earth did you get up?’ Langley exclaimed. ‘Have you seen a doctor?’

‘No ; but I think you shall go and fetch some one,’ she answered, hoarsely and faintly. ‘Did you send the stuff to Tomlinson?’

‘Oh yes, and forged your signature. Go back to bed ; I’ll——’

‘Wait a minute. I want to ask you—I haven’t any money——’

The change from her wonted vigour of speech and bearing was very painful to the young man. Money? Why, his purse was hers. In his pocket he had only a few sovereigns, but he would go to the bank straightway.

'Three or four pounds will do,' she replied. 'I don't know any one else I care to ask. Borrowing isn't in my line, you know. I could sell or pawn some things—but I haven't the strength to get about.'

Langley stepped towards her and put coins into her hand.

'What is it?' he asked, gravely. 'A fever of some kind?'

'I'm not feverish—at least I don't think so. Fearful head. Look chalky, don't I?'

'You do. Go back to bed at once, and leave things to me.'

'You're a good fellow, Wilfrid.'

'Pooh!'

'I feel so wretchedly weak—and I *hate* to feel weak—I——'

She suddenly turned her head away ; and Langley was horrified to hear her sob. He moved for a moment about the room, as if in search of something ; but it only served to hide his embarrassment. Then Miss Childerstone stood up, and went quickly away.

In half an hour's time the necessary assistance had been procured. Nervous collapse, said the man of medicine ; overwork, and so on. Langley, finding that no one in the house could act as bedside attendant, obtained the services of a nurse. He did not see his friend again, but had a message from h

that she was 'all right ;' he might call the next day, if he liked.

He paid the call as early as ten o'clock, and had a talk with the nurse, who could give but an indifferant report.

'If I write a few lines for her, can she read them?' he asked.

Yes, she could read a letter. So Langley sat down at the table, and tried to find something to say. To his surprise, he wrote with the utmost difficulty ; words would not come. 'Dear Miss Childerstone,— I feel sure that a little rest and nursing will soon——.' Oh, that was insufferably childish. He bit his pen, and stared at the books before him : novels and plays, heaped newspapers, a volume or two of an encyclopædia, annuals, and dictionaries. She had no instinct of order ; she lived from day to day, from hand to mouth. Her education must be very defective. On the moral side, no doubt, she was sound enough, but a woman should have domestic virtues.

What was he doing ? Abusing his friend just when she lay helpless, and this defeat of her splendid strength the result of toil on a sister's behalf ! He tore the sheet of paper and began anew. 'Dear Bertha'— why not ? she now and then called him 'Wilfrid'— 'don't trouble your head about anything. I have nothing to do, and to look after you will give me pleasure. Is there anyone you would like to communicate with ? Consider me absolutely at your

service—time, money, anything. I will call morning and evening. Cheer up, dear old chum! You must go away as soon as possible; I'll get lodgings for you.'

And so on, over another page, in the hearty comrade tone which they always used to each other. The nurse, summoned by a light tap, handed this note to her patient, and in a few minutes she brought back a scrap of paper, on which was feebly scrawled in pencil, 'Good old boy. All right.'

It was the last he saw of Bertha Childerstone's handwriting for more than a month. Daily he called twice. What the nurse, doctor, and landlady thought of his relations with the invalid he would not trouble to conjecture. He met all current expenses, which amounted to not very much. And the result of it was that the sick woman became an almost exclusive subject of his thoughts; his longing to speak again with her grew intense.

One day in July, as he stepped as usual into the parlour, thinking to wait there for the nurse, his eye fell upon a figure sitting in the sunlight. A pale, thin face, which he scarcely recognised, greeted him with a smile, and a meagre hand was held out to him.

'Up? Oh, that's brave!'

He hurried forward and clasped her hand tightly. They gazed at each other. Langley felt a thrill in his blood, a dimness about his eyes, and before he

knew what he was doing he had given and received a kiss.

‘No harm,’ said Miss Childerstone, laughing with a look of confusion. ‘*Honi soit qui mal y pense!*’

But the young man could not recover himself. He was kneeling by the chair in which she reclined, and still kept her hand, whilst he quivered as if with fever.

‘I’m so glad—I wanted so to see you—Bertha ——’

‘Hush! Don’t be sentimental, old man. It’s all right.’

He pressed her hand to his lips. She abandoned it for a moment, then firmly drew it back.

‘Tell me all the news.’

‘I know of nothing, except that I——’

He had lost his head. Bertha seemed to him now not only a woman, but beautiful and sweet and an object of passionate desire. He touched her hair, and stammered incoherencies.

‘Wilfrid’—she spoke in the old blunt way—‘don’t make a fool of yourself. Go a yard or two away, there’s a good boy. If not, I hobble back into the other room. Remember that I can’t stand excitement.’

Eyes averted, he moved away from her.

‘I had a letter from Cissy this morning——’

‘I don’t want to hear of it,’ he interrupted pettishly. ‘She was the cause of your illness.’

Miss Childerstone pursued in the same tone.

‘—Posted at Cape Town. Very cheerful. She was enjoying the voyage, and looking forward to its end in a reasonable and happy way. We did the right thing. There’s a letter, too, from the expectant lover ; a good letter ; you may see it if you like.’

Common-sense came at length to Wilfrid’s support. He sat down, crossed his legs, and talked, but without looking at his companion.

‘I owe you a lot of money,’ said Bertha.

‘Rubbish ! When can you go away ? And what place would you prefer ?’

‘I shall go next week to the seaside. Anywhere near. Some place where there are lots of people. I was dead, and am alive again ; I want to feel the world buzzing round.’

‘Very well. Choose a place, and I’ll go after rooms for you.’

‘No, no. I can do all that by letter. By-the-bye, I’ve been hearing from Tomlinson. He’s a better sort of fellow than I supposed. What do you think ? He sent me a cheque for five-and-twenty pounds—on account, he says.’

Langley kept his head down, and muttered something.

‘I suppose somebody or other has been pitching him a doleful story about me. It took a long time before people missed me ; now they’re beginning to write and call.’

‘Yes—you have a great many friends——’

‘Heaps of them! Now, goosey, don’t hang your head. The fact of the matter is, we oughtn’t to have met just yet. There’s an artificial atmosphere about an invalid. You’re not to come again till I send for you—you hear that?’

‘As you please,’ answered Langley, shamefaced, but no longer petulant. And he stayed only a few minutes after this. At parting, their eyes did not meet.

That night he wrote a letter, the inevitable letter, page upon page, strictly according to precedent. When two days had brought no answer, he wrote again, and this time elicited a short scrawl.

‘Goosey, goosey gander! I don’t like the style of these compositions; it isn’t up to your later mark. Go and see Totty—Lotty—what’s her name? I mean it; you want the tonic of such society. And pray, what work are you doing? Come to-morrow at three and tell me.’

He would have liked to refuse the invitation, but had fallen into so limp a state that there was no choice save to go and be tortured. Miss Childerstone looked better.

‘I pick up very quickly,’ she said. ‘In the early days, before I knew you, I had a worse floorer than this, and astonished everyone by the way I came round. Well, what are you doing?’

‘Nothing much,’ the young man replied carelessly.

She pondered a little, then laughed.

‘Now isn’t it an odd thing, how far we were from knowing each other? I misunderstood you; I did indeed; as it goes without saying that you quite misunderstood me. I didn’t think you could have written those letters.’

‘I’m not ashamed of them.’

A certain quiet manliness in the words had its effect upon Miss Childerstone. She smiled, and regarded him kindly.

‘Nor need you be, my dear boy. For my part, I’m considerably proud of them; I shall store them up and read them in years to come when they have a value as autographs. But I suppose you had purposely misled me, with your random talk. If I had known—yes, if I had known—I don’t think I should have let Cissy go to Natal.’

‘Stop that nonsense,’ said Langley, ‘and answer me a plain question. Is it hopeless?—or can’t you make up your mind yet?’

‘I *have* made up my mind—since receiving your letters.’

‘Before, you were in doubt?’

‘Just a wee bit. Partly, I suppose, because of my weakness. I like you so much, and I have such hopes of your future—it was tempting. But—No!’

Langley looked at her with eyes of thwarted passion.

‘What do you mean? Just because I have really and honestly fallen in love with you——’

‘Just so,’ she interrupted, ‘and shown yourself as I didn’t know you. I like you as much as ever—more, perhaps. I more than half wish I could bring Cissy back again. You would have suited each other very well. And yet, it would have been an unkindness to *you*, however kind to *her*. It meant, for you, a sinking into the comfortable commonplace. You are too young for marriage. I had rather see you in any kind of entanglement. That longing for domesticity gave me a shudder. It’s admirable, but it’s the part of you that must be outgrown. Oh, you are so much more respectable than I thought.’

She broke off, laughing.

‘And you mean to say,’ exclaimed Wilfrid, ‘that if I could have given proof of blackguardism you might have been inclined to marry me?’

Miss Childerstone laughed uncontrollably.

‘Oh, how young you are! No, I shouldn’t have married you in any case. I might have promised to think about it. I might have promised to do it; but when the time came—*via*! Dear boy, I don’t want to marry. Look at this room, dirty and disorderly. This is all the home I care for. Conceivably, I might marry a man with a big income, just for the sake of a large life. But it’s only just conceivable. In poverty—and anything you or I can count upon would be poverty—I prefer the freedom of loneliness.’

*

‘You imagine I should lay any restraint upon you?’

Again she broke into laughter.

‘I have a pretty good theoretical knowledge of what marriage means. Unfortunately, one can’t experiment.’

Langley turned from her, and stared gloomily.

‘Look here,’ said his companion. ‘In a few days I think I shall be strong enough to go away, and I shall not tell you where I’m going. Let us say goodbye, and see each other again when we’re both recovered. In the meantime, live and work. Give fifteen-pound suppers, if you like. Anything to keep your thoughts off domesticity. Cultivate black-guardism’—her voice rang mirthfully. ‘Then we shall get back to the old footing.’

‘Never!’

‘Well, that’s as you please. I should like it, though.’

He left her, and determined neither to write nor to call again. In a day or two the former resolve was broken; he wrote at greater length than ever. When the silence that followed became unendurable, he went to the house, but only to learn that Miss Childerstone had left that morning.

For the mere sake of talking about her, he spent the evening with people who had known his friend for a long time. They, it appeared, were ignorant of her movements.

'Gone as war correspondent, I shouldn't wonder,' said a young man; and the laughter of the company appreciated his joke.

'Oh, she really is too mannish,' remarked a young matron. 'I suppose you study her as a curiosity, Mr. Langley?'

'We're great chums,' Wilfrid answered with a laugh.

'Well, at all events we needn't bid *you* beware,' jested the lady.

On reaching home, late, he found in his sitting-room an object which greatly puzzled him; it was a large and handsome travelling-bag, new from some shop. By what mistake had it got here? He examined it, and found a ticket bearing his name and address. Then, turning to the table, he saw a letter, the address in a well-known hand.

'DEAR OLD MAN,—I shall not offer to pay back the money you have spent upon me, but I'm sending a present, one of the useful order.

'Yours in *camaraderie*,

'B. C.'

After a day or two of brooding he saw the use of Bertha's gift, and for a month the travelling-bag did him good service.

He and she had long been back in town, and were again tugging hard at the collar, before they met. It was a miserable day of November, and

amid sleet, fog, slush, they came face to face on the pavement of the roaring Strand. Their umbrellas had collided, and as they shook hands the hurrying pedestrians bumped them this way and that.

‘All right again?’ asked Bertha merrily.

‘Quite,’ was the stalwart reply. ‘Come somewhere and talk.’

‘Can’t. Appointment in ten minutes.’

‘Move on, please!’ shouted a policeman. ‘Mustn’t stop the way.’

‘Lunch at the old place to-morrow?’ said Wilfrid hurriedly.

‘Yes. Two o’clock.’

Each plodded on, and Langley had no cardiac tremor as he thought of Miss Childerstone. For all that—for all that—he could not forget that he had kissed her lips.

THE JUSTICE AND THE VAGABOND

MR. RUTLAND did not feel well this morning. As he dressed, a sense of faintness troubled him, the result, perhaps, of very hot weather in these days of spring. After breakfast he reclined languidly in the study, trying to read. There was no absolute necessity for his going forth ; but at eleven he drove into the town to sit with his brother magistrates, preferring the tedium of the court to lonely idleness at home.

His age was about five-and-forty, and to a casual eye he seemed in good health ; but certain lines upon his countenance denoted a habit of melancholy musing, and his voice suggested the same. The townspeople, regarding his wealth and social influence, his apparent domestic peace and life of leisure, judged him an enviable man. Mr. Rutland saw himself in a very different light, and to-day he suffered especially from the despondence which had weighed upon him for many years.

Born to easy circumstances, he had married at three-and-twenty ; six children had been born to him, all daughters, but only three of them survived, the youngest a girl of fifteen. His wife was a woman of

narrow mind and strong will ; she ruled him in every detail of his life—unobtrusively, suavely, without suspecting for a moment that the yoke galled him, or anticipating the possibility of conflict between his purpose and hers. Mrs. Rutland belonged to a county family, and valued above all things her local prestige : when she went to London it was only to associate with those of her country friends whom fashion had directed townwards ; if she took a holiday abroad it was merely for the sake of its retrospective advantages on her return home. She regarded everything from a rigidly provincial point of view. Her daughters were admirably brought up—that is to say, with a conscientiousness which never lost sight of their destiny as county ladies. The father had as little voice in their education as in the daily management of his household. Of him Mrs. Rutland expected only that he should exert himself to support the dignity of his name in county circles. To please her, he had twice contested a Parliamentary election, but on both occasions was defeated. Twice he had been mayor of the town in which he owned much property, and near to which he lived. Mrs. Rutland viewed this as rather a condescension, but it kept the good man occupied. For the same reason she liked him to discharge his functions as justice of the peace. At her bidding he took part in various local activities : opened flower-shows, presided at important lectures, encouraged movements for the (moderate) benefit of

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working folk, and so on—all which duties Mr. Rutland thoroughly disliked. But still more did he dislike the shadow of domestic discord, and he knew very well that his independence could only be asserted at the cost of his tranquillity.

All his acquaintances spoke well of him. One or two old friends regretted the lack of energy which frustrated his natural abilities, and wondered that a man so well read, so interesting in private talk, should be content to lead such a humdrum existence. But as to the amiability and generosity of his character opinions never differed. As a magistrate, he enjoyed a reputation for leniency, and the town scamps whom he could not but commit to jail counted on Mr. Rutland's compassion when they came out again.

This morning, when he entered the court, a case of assault was being heard. Evidently a paltry matter. The prisoner, a stranger in the town, had obtained work at house-painting, and while thus occupied, an hour or two ago, had got into a quarrel with a loafing fellow, who accused him of some trade irregularity. Losing patience under insult, he knocked the man down, and was forthwith given into the charge of a constable who stood by. Mr. Rutland observed the prisoner, and at once felt a peculiar interest in him; ~~face~~ and bearing spoke strongly on the man's behalf; he looked superior to his position, and, though uncomfortable in the present circumstances, was neither shamefaced nor impudent. Aged forty or more, he

had a clear brown skin, a bright intelligent eye, and a strong upright figure.

'What's his name?' inquired Mr. Rutland, in an undertone, of his neighbour on the bench.

'Henry Goodeve.'

'Goodeve—Goodeve——'

Mr. Rutland reflected with a puzzled countenance, and again scrutinised the prisoner. At that moment Goodeve's voice was heard in answer to a question. Mr. Rutland listened intently; and his features betrayed some strange thought.

A trivial fine was imposed, whereupon the prisoner declared that he had neither money nor money's worth—unless it were the clothing he stood in. He had arrived in the town only yesterday, all but penniless, and this morning had found work. The statement was made with a half-amused air. Moreover, the man's speech made proof that he was no ordinary artisan; his tongue, though not particularly refined, smacked of gentle breeding.

'I shall pay for him,' said Mr. Rutland privately. 'And I must have a word with him out of court.'

The prisoner's case was allowed to stand over for half an hour. Led, at Mr. Rutland's direction, into a private room, Goodeve saw, to his surprise, that one of the magistrates wished to speak with him.

'May I ask,' began the kindly looking gentleman, 'whether you were at school at Brockhurst?'

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‘I was,’ answered Goodeve with a smile, gazing steadily into the questioner’s face. ‘I left in ’62.’

‘The year before I did. Have you no recollection of me?’

‘I’m afraid I haven’t. And yet——’

‘My name is Rutland—Dick Rutland.’

The other slapped his thigh, and broke into words of delighted recognition. Thirty years ago these men were chums inseparable at a boarding-school of good repute. They came from different counties, and did not know each other’s kinsfolk; Harry Goodeve was the son of a struggling shopkeeper, and had little to hope for save from his own efforts; while Dick Rutland saw the path of life smooth and pleasant before him. At fifteen Goodeve was put into an office, where he idled and played pranks; at sixteen he went to sea, and from that day to this he had been a cheery vagabond on the face of the earth.

‘You must come to my house,’ said Mr. Rutland after a few minutes’ talk. ‘It happens that I am quite alone for a few days; my wife and daughters are in London. Half-an-hour’s walk from here; anyone will show you the way. I shall be home at half-past one.’

‘What about my fine?’

‘Pooh! We’ll soon settle that.’

When his Worship reached home he found the vagabond stretched at full length on a shady part of

the lawn ; a gardener, in doubt as to his assertions, had kept an eye upon the man.

‘Is there a pond or stream anywhere about here,’ Goodeve asked, ‘where a fellow could have a plunge?’

‘Well, no. But if you don’t despise an ordinary bath——’

‘Not at all, when I can do no better.’

They sat down together to luncheon ; a strange contrast as to their clothing, but in other respects no unsuitable companions. Goodeve betrayed not the least embarrassment amid these luxurious surroundings : he ate and drank with hearty appetite, and talked merrily of old days. His host, seeming to throw off a burden of care, astonished the domestic in attendance no less by his boyish gaiety than by his intimacy with so strange a guest. As yet, nothing was said of intervening years : they lived again in their schooltime, discussed the masters, roared over ancient jokes, revived the great days of cricket and football. Goodeve began to ask what had become of this, that, and the other fellow ; they were now alone, and could speak more freely.

‘Gubbins disappeared,’ said Mr. Rutland. ‘His father was mixed up in a disagreeable affair, and I’m afraid the poor chap——’

‘Ah!’ cried the other, ‘I met him in New Zealand ten or twelve years ago. He was at the bar—serving liquor.’

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‘Heavens!’

‘And Potts—Toady Potts, not Sammy. I came across him in Sumatra. He was clerking for a Dutch pepper-grower; had intermittent fever, and must be dead long ago.’

‘How have you travelled so much?’ asked Mr. Rutland. ‘As a sailor?’

‘Generally working my passage, but not always. On land I’ve been a bit of everything. I’m a good carpenter—you remember, I had the knack at school—and I reckon myself no bad hand at plumbing. I’ve done a little tailoring now and then. I’ve gained glory as a scene-painter, and made shift to live by taking photographs. It’s only in England that I’ve sometimes found it hard to get a meal. Oh, yes! I often come back to the Old Country, though I have no relatives left. I get home-sick, and make plans for settling down, but I suppose I never shall. I landed at Southampton five weeks ago from Bahia—an old friend of mine is in the tobacco business there, and I went just to see him, from Jamaica. Well, I landed with a dollar or two, found the weather pleasant, and just tramped, with nothing particular in prospect. At home here I generally fall back on house-painting, though it isn’t always easy to get work. I don’t take kindly to the rougher sorts of work. Last time, five years ago, I had to do a bit of navvying, down in Kent. It didn’t suit me, and I soon shipped again.’

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‘What a life!’ murmured the listener, staring before him.

‘Oh, not so bad——’

‘You misunderstand me. I mean, what a glorious life! I envy you, Goodeve; with heart and soul I envy you!’

‘You do? Well, I can’t quite understand that either. A man who has a house like this; free to come and go as the humour takes him——’

‘Free!’ cried the host. ‘Don’t judge by appearances. You ought to know the world better. There’s no man living who is more a slave than I am.’

His voice quivered into silence, and he seemed to reprove himself for indiscretion.

‘Come out into the garden, old fellow. Light another cigar, and put some in your pocket.’

This afternoon there was a garden-party at a house in the neighbourhood, and Mr. Rutland had promised to attend it. By failing to do so he would excite surprise, and cause no little disappointment to the people who counted his presence an honour. But time stole on; he felt ever more reluctant to leave his entertaining companion for the wearisome society of his neighbours; at length he said to himself deliberately that go he would not. Let Mrs. Rutland express her astonishment when she heard of the neglect. ‘But, my dear Richard, surely it was rather——’ He shut his ears against the voice, and listened only to Goodeve.

‘—The next day we sighted the Horn. I forgot all my hardships. Do you remember how we used to talk of it at school—going round the Horn? I thought of you then; I did indeed.’

At seven o’clock, when the sun was setting and the air had grown cool, Mr. Rutland rose and stretched himself.

‘There’s the first dinner-bell. Hours have gone like minutes.’

‘All the same, I’m pretty hungry,’ laughed Goodeve.

‘Why, so am I; the first time I’ve had an appetite for years. It’s the sea air. What a life! What a life! Of course, you’ll stay here over-night. Your coming was a godsend. I feel young again. I begin to see things——’

He broke off and walked with his head down, musing.

After dinner—a meal of scandalous informality—they went into the library, and Goodeve began to run his eye along the shelves.

‘Why, you seem to have nothing here but books of travel. I can’t make you out, Rutland. If you’ve always thought as much of travelling as you did at school, why the deuce have you led such a stay-at-home life? Wife and family! But you’ve always been a rich man. What was to prevent you going trips about the world as other men do?’

What, indeed? In the days of love-making Rut-

land delighted himself with the thought that he and his beloved would journey far and wide, beholding all the glories and the wonders of earth. Their honeymoon was to include a visit to Egypt; but Mrs. Rutland soon discovered that she had little taste for foreign countries, and on the hither side of the Alps they turned homeward. The births of his children, which came in rapid succession, loaded year by year the fetters of domestic bondage; until the poor rich man stifled in silence his last hope. At the suggestion of distant travel Mrs. Rutland would have smiled indulgently—that terrible smile which her husband knew so well, a smile as of implacable fate. ‘Richard is so fanciful,’ he once overheard her say to a lady, and the word had a dread weight of meaning.

They opened a great atlas, and Mr. Rutland followed his friend’s voyaging from land to land. Their heads together, and talking with the completest familiarity, they were as boys again. Thus had they sat many a time on the school benches, the map before them, and schemed expeditions of discovery. In those days Dick Rutland was the more sanguine, the more energetic, conscious of possessing wherewithal to travel: Harry Goodeve merely dreamed and desired. Now, with thirty years of subsequent life behind them, Mr. Rutland, the prosperous man, the local magnate, felt his heart burn within him as he heard Goodeve tell of joys and perils which put a circle round the globe.

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‘Ah, you have lived!’ he exclaimed at length, starting up and moving excitedly about the room. ‘It is you who have been the rich man; I, a miserable pauper! The Arabs have a proverb, “Travel is conquest.” You have conquered the world, whilst I have been crouched in my petty corner, playing at life. I go down yonder, and sit in a big chair, and look as wise as an owl, and send poor devils to prison: this is the utmost I have attained to. You have been living among men, working, suffering, enjoying like a man, and every day learning something new. Good God! it maddens me to look back on these thirty years, and contrast my vegetable existence with such a life as yours. Can you imagine the sort of people I have to do with? Men and women who wear a certain kind of costume in the morning, and a different kind at night, and who know nothing more important than the change from one to the other. We attend meetings about local option, and you—you are fighting a hurricane in mid ocean, or landing in some new port, with a new world before you.’

‘Hang it, man!’ shouted the other with a great laugh, ‘it’s not too late. You’re no older than I am.’

Mr. Rutland stared at him with fascinated eyes.

‘Yes—yes,’ he said slowly and under his breath. ‘I might see something of the world yet.’

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He moved again to the atlas, and turned to the map of South America.

'That's one of the things I most wish to see—the river Amazon.'

'Little more than a fortnight's voyage,' replied Goodeve mirthfully.

'A fortnight! Yes. A fortnight.'

Mr. Rutland spoke as one in a dream. His finger trembled as it marked the course of the great river.

'Go to Bahia,' said Goodeve, 'and see my friend the tobacco-merchant. A fine fellow. He can tell you more in an hour than I could in a week. I wish I could go with you.'

Again Mr. Rutland stood and stared at his guest.

'Why not? You mean the expense of going as a passenger? What's that to me? Say you will go, and——'

He paused, his hand in the air, and seemed to be fronting a vast enterprise. However ludicrous the obstacles in another's sight, to Mr. Rutland they meant nothing less than the crushing habits of a lifetime.

'I'll go fast enough,' said Goodeve, seeming to sniff the Atlantic.

'We might do more than just go to Brazil and back,' pursued his host, whose face had grown very red. 'If I once left England, I shouldn't be content

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to see only one country. I should like to travel for a year or more—perhaps for two or three years.'

His voice quivered and his eyes flashed. Good-eve watched him with a smile of sympathy.

'Will you travel with me, Harry, as far and as long as I like?'

'Of course I will! When can you be ready to start?'

Mr. Rutland fell into a reverie. He was silent for more than five minutes, then drew a deep breath, and said gravely—

'To-day is Wednesday. I will be ready to leave home on Saturday morning.'

'We must look up the steam-boats.'

'Yes; but whether there is a ship or not, I shall leave home on Saturday morning, and join you where you like. Stay with me one more day. I shall be busy, but I want to have you near. On Friday you shall go, and on Saturday we meet again at Liverpool, or Southampton, or wherever you appoint.'

They sat talking till late in the night, and, among other things, it was arranged that Goodeve should next day change his rude clothing for a garb more suitable to Mr. Rutland's guest. He was in no way troubled by a sense of obligation. Thirty years of adventurous life had taught him to regard things with simplicity and directness: if a wealthy man chose to relieve his friend ~~of~~ all worldly cares,

why should the friend make any difficulty? Good-eve was a bluff, plain-spoken, honest fellow, quite incapable of scheming for his own advantage. The fine points of his character appealed to Mr. Rutland as strongly as in the days gone by. Rough living, labour, and the companionship of his inferiors had not debased him; what he lacked in refinement of manner was abundantly compensated by his sincerity, good-nature, and freshness of mind. Mr. Rutland's circumstances appeared to him in a humorous light; he suspected that the poor fellow lived under female tyranny, and to Goodeve such a state of things was inexplicable. He enjoyed the thought of releasing his old comrade from this sorry fix, and the joke was all the better if, as he suspected, Rutland meant to escape from bondage during his wife's absence.

That, indeed, was his Worship's project. Knowing the uselessness of an attempt to sleep, Mr. Rutland sat up all night, busy with multifarious concerns: arranging papers, writing letters, reviewing his personal, domestic, and public affairs. The suddenness with which he had taken his resolve, the firmness with which he held to it, seemed to him a manifestation of destiny; for, like all contemplative and irresolute men, he had a vein of philosophic superstition. He knew that his purpose must be put into effect at once; Goodeve's arrival in the absence of Mrs. Rutland was a coincidence which, the more he thought of it made him the more eager to depart.

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His wife and daughters were to return on Saturday evening. He would leave a mere note, saying that he had just left home with a friend, and might be away for a day or two. Later, but before she had had time to grow uneasy, Mrs. Rutland should receive the full explanation.

There was no serious obstacle whatever in the way of his proposed flight. He could easily commit to his solicitors the care of all such matters as Mrs. Rutland would be unable to deal with. His departure need not make the smallest change in the life of his family. The mother and daughters would pursue their course as methodically, as respectably, as ever. In pecuniary affairs Mrs. Rutland had always held an independent position ; she was better fitted to manage everything of the kind than her husband. It would cost him no severe pang to be long away from his children, for they belonged to their mother rather than to him ; the one who had loved him best was dead. Yes ; by Saturday morning he might so have ordered everything in his control as to feel entirely free. A boyish rapture in the thought of what was before him made him regardless of the wonder, the censure, the gossip he was leaving behind.

About the hour of sunrise he was overcome with exhaustion—not a feeling of wholesome weariness, not a desire for sleep ; but an oppressive faintness, like that which troubled him yesterday morning.

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He explained it, naturally enough, as the result of unwonted excitement. A drop of brandy seemed to do him good, and he lay down ; but no sleep came to him.

Through the day he pursued his business, though languidly ; the weather was again very warm, and it seemed to overpower him.

‘I shall soon pick up on the sea,’ he remarked to Goodeve at luncheon, after confessing that he hadn’t been ‘quite the thing’ lately. ‘It’s just what I need. I have lived sluggishly—foregone all custom of exercise, as Hamlet says. If I went on like this, I should smoulder out at fifty or so.’

‘As likely as not,’ assented the other genially.

Again they passed a long evening together, with the big atlas open ; and again Mr. Rutland worked himself into a fever of anticipation. When he went to bed his eyes looked very large and prominent, and his cheeks were burning. For an hour or two he tossed in misery of sleeplessness, then fell into fearful dreams of storm and wreck, which harassed him until day.

On the Friday morning Goodeve departed. He had learnt that a steamer would leave Southampton on Monday for Rio de Janeiro, which place they agreed to make the starting-point of their travels. The new clothing irked him a little, but, on the whole, he was rather pleased with his appearance ; he went off in high spirits, well provided with money to make

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necessary purchases at Southampton. He had already telegraphed for berths to the shipping agents, and had received a satisfactory reply.

It rained a little to-day, and Mr. Rutland enjoyed the coolness. He thought with some apprehension of the climate for which he was setting forth, but reassured himself with the certainty that a fortnight on shipboard would quite re-establish him in health and vigour. There was nothing really the matter with him; of course not. His mind had affected his body; that was all. Then, if Brazil proved uncomfortable, he and his friend would simply travel north or south. The world lay open before him, like the atlas over which he had so often pored. He set no limit to the extent of his wanderings, and had quite resolved that nothing save ill-news from home should bring him back before the end of a year or two.

When he *did* return he would no longer be the same man. His wife would know by then that her reign was over.

He had now transacted all his business, and the hours dragged. There was a letter from Mrs. Rutland speaking of her return to-morrow, and requiring his attention to a score of vexatious trivialities; he laughed, and threw it aside. In the afternoon, feeling incapable of the least exertion, he lay on the couch in his study; his heart was beating rapidly, and he tried to calm the mental agitation which disturbed it, but every hour seemed to intensify his excitement.

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He dreaded the long evening and night, and wished himself already at Southampton.

At dinner he ate only a little soup. There was no disguising from himself that he felt seriously unwell, and the dread of being unable to start in the morning kept him miserably agitated. From table he went again into the study, and sat down in an arm-chair with a newspaper. As his body lay back he drew a deep sigh.

Shortly after ten o'clock the butler wished to speak with Mr. Rutland ; he knocked at the study door, and entered. But on drawing near he saw that his master had fallen asleep.

An hour later he again entered the room. Mr. Rutland had not moved, and the servant, regarding him more closely, became aware of something strange in his appearance. He bent to listen. Mr. Rutland was not breathing.

And next day, at Southampton, Henry Goodeve sought vainly among the passengers who arrived by a certain train. ' Hanged if I wasn't afraid of it ! ' he muttered in vexation. ' His wife has come back and caught him.'

THE FIREBRAND

AT the age of eighteen Andrew Mowbray Catterick vanished from among his kith and kin. They soon learnt that he was gone to London, and as this movement had been foreseen for a long time, the North Country folk made no fuss about it ; if London proved too much for him, he had only to come back. Mrs. Catterick enjoyed a comfortable four hundred per annum, which at her death would be divided between Andrew and his sister. That the lad took his resolve and acted quietly upon it, without taxing anyone or calling for applause, seemed a point in his favour. If hitherto he had earned no high esteem, he had done nothing to be ashamed of. Rather an idle dog—said his impartial acquaintances—and a trifle given to self-praise ; but no one denied his cleverness. At Mapplebeck, a grey and sooty little town ringed about with collieries, he was not likely to do much good ; and his ‘gift of the gab,’ as people called it, would sooner or later involve him in difficulties. A young fellow in a public office should not meddle with politics, and can gain nothing by displays of oratory at pot-houses frequented by pitmen. Let him shift for himself in a

larger world. Five pounds or so was the fortune he carried with him ; capable men have gone forth and conquered with much less.

From eighteen to three-and-twenty Andrew doubtless had a hard time of it. He wrote very seldom, and disregarded invitations to visit the old home. Such reports as he made were of dubious complexion ; that he lived was clear, but no one at Mapplebeck knew exactly how. Writing, however, on his twenty-third birthday, the young man announced that he had secured regular employment as a journalist in connection with two London papers ; and presently he began to send specimens of his work. Mrs. Catterick, the widow of a town-clerk and herself much respected in the Conservative society of Mapplebeck, thought it a sad pity that her son persevered in revolutionary opinion : she did not care to circulate the newspapers he posted to her. Miss Bertha, now engaged to a solicitor of a neighbouring town, felt proud that Andrew had made such progress, and declared her indifference to his views if only he achieved a good position. Before long the journalist sent down a series of articles which, he said, were attracting attention—descriptions of obscure industries in London and elsewhere. He spoke, too, of allowing himself a holiday, and of coming home.

A couple of months elapsed without more news. Then, on an evening of September, Andrew presented himself at his mother's door.

It was difficult to recognise him. Not only had time converted the lanky stripling into a tall, wiry specimen of bearded manhood, but he looked so deplorably ill that Mrs. Catterick's first exclamation was one of alarm. As if the journey had overtaxed him, he dropped upon the nearest chair, and wiped moisture from his clay-coloured face. Yes, he was seedy. He had been overdoing it. He must have a good long rest. Mother and sister straightway devoted themselves to nursing him. The old doctor, friend of his childhood, was called into council. Andrew talked to him with a quiet air of condescension, yet as if grateful for the kindness with which he was surrounded.

'Sleep? Oh, my dear doctor! I haven't slept for a year or so. Sleep is such an expensive luxury; a journalist making his way has to do without it. Meals? Oh, I really forget. I eat now and then, I believe. Why, yes; not long ago I dined at the National Liberal Club with the editor of the *Morning Star*; so on that occasion, at all events, I ate. But, do you know, I find a bit of anchovy toast and a glass of cognac about the best thing, on most days. I suppose I ruined my stomach with *vache enragée*.'

'What in the world is that?' asked the good doctor.

'Merely a pedantry for starvation, my dear sir. For three or four years I had simply nothing to eat. We all go through it, you know. A friend of mine,

a novelist, says he thinks nothing of the man who hasn't starved to begin with. At the same time I drank rather too much. What would you have? Nervous force must be kept up somehow.'

The doctor began to entertain a suspicion that this habit of drinking was not yet outgrown; he privately doubted whether Andrew's state of collapse had anything to do with excessive toil. In a day or two, however, he felt sure that his misgivings were unjustifiable. Catterick's case allowed of but one diagnosis: the young man had lived preposterously, but not as a debauchee. He had worked himself like a machine, disregarding every admonition of rebellious nature.

'And do you imagine, Andrew, that this kind of thing will lead to anything except the grave?'

'I can't keep it up; that I have discovered. But so far it has paid. The editors know me. Nowadays, doctor, a man who aims at success in any profession must be content to take his chance between that and death. If I don't get out of the ruck, I may as well die.'

Talk in this vein amused the old practitioner, who regarded his patient as a boy, and studied in him the latest forms of puerile conceit. But not everyone could listen so urbanely. Robert Holdsworth, who came over to make the acquaintance of his future brother-in-law, had much ado to disguise contemptuous irritation; he resented the easy patronage of Andrew's

behaviour, and half believed him a disreputable impostor. Talking privately with Bertha, he asked why her brother had allowed so many years to pass without visiting his relatives.

‘Oh,’ replied the girl, with a laugh, ‘he made a confession about that only yesterday. His pride wouldn’t let him come till he had done something that people could talk about.’

‘Andrew’s pride seems to be the great feature of his character,’ Holdsworth remarked drily. ‘And what *has* he done? A little anonymous journalism. I don’t think that justifies his airs.’

‘He does put it on rather. But, you know, he has worked frightfully!’

‘So have a good many people.’

‘Yes; but it’s a great thing to write for London newspapers—don’t you think? And he has made friends with such a lot of important men.’

Andrew took care that his arrival at Mapplebeck should be made known by the local paper. A short biography appeared in its columns, and the writer expressed his deep regret that Mr. Catterick had been ordered to abstain for the present from all literary work. He added:

‘This is the penalty paid by too many of our rising journalists. The conditions of modern journalism are terribly trying, and a young man of Mr. Catterick’s distinguished ability is tempted to efforts beyond the endurance of human nature.’

With old acquaintances, most of whom were very sober and practical folk, Andrew made ostentatious display of his advanced opinions. He gave the good people to understand that Mapplebeck was a very sleepy little place, a century or so behind the civilisation which he himself represented. Occasionally he met with blunt answers, but they moved him only to a smile. People might say of him what they liked, if only they recognised his enormous advance in the interval since he disappeared from Mapplebeck. Superior to ordinary conversation, he discoursed in lively monologues, generally standing. His inquiries about local affairs were made in an indulgent tone. He deigned to show interest in the histories of young men, his contemporaries, who still remained in the town.

‘Ah! poor old Robertson! I must have a talk with him. And Tom Gerard has three children? Amazing! It passes my comprehension how a fellow of any brains—and Tom *had* brains—can handicap himself in that way. Men don’t marry nowadays—not till they have *arrived*.’

But about this time the local mind began to be occupied with a question which ultimately proved of national concern. Throughout the mining districts there was talk of an impending coal strike. Catterick, whose recuperative powers had soon overcome the grave symptoms of his disorder, amused himself with walking about the neighbourhood and holding

converse with pitmen ; whence it naturally came to pass that he one day found himself haranguing a coaly group, to whom he expounded the principles of modern industrial liberty. He came home in an excited state of mind, and from the hearthrug repeated to his mother and sister the oration he had publicly delivered.

‘ I think it very wrong to go talking in that way,’ declared Mrs. Catterick. ‘ You may make a deal of trouble.’

‘ Very likely,’ Andrew replied, with modest allusion to his powers as an agitator.

‘ You have no business to encourage these men to strike,’ exclaimed his sister. ‘ And what will our friends say if they hear of it ? ’

The suggestion confirmed Andrew in a resolve. A strike there undoubtedly would be, sooner or later, and how could he more profitably occupy his leisure than in helping to bring it about ? The public eye would at once be fixed on him ; with care and skill he might achieve more than local distinction, and the journalistic matter thus supplied to him would be all in the way of business.

A mile or so beyond Mapplebeck was a colliers’ hamlet known as Pit Row ; it consisted literally of a row of cottages set on the black soil hard by a coal-pit—grimy little boxes, all built precisely alike, with a plot of sorry garden in front of each, and behind them the walled back-yards, where shirts and

petticoats flapped in sooty air. Andrew decided to open his campaign at Pit Row. Thither he went on a Sunday morning, and inquired for Sam Dollop, a collier whose acquaintance he had made in casual talk on the road. Sam was a local firebrand, and it flattered him to be associated with a gentleman from London who had exactly his views as to the rights of the miner. Easily enough they collected the inhabitants of Pit Row ; speeches were made, and Andrew scored an important point when he uttered a sentence or two in the dialect of his hearers. Mapplebeck, he went on to assure them, was his native place. He stood here as no interloper. From childhood's days he had regarded with compassion the hard lot of men who toiled underground ; and now that fortune had favoured him, now that he had won by sheer hard work a somewhat prominent place in Metropolitan journalism, he felt it to be only his duty to come down and take part with his old friends in their struggle against the avarice of capitalists.

He had not long to wait for the public effect of these proceedings. Respectable Mapplebeck talked indignantly of his reckless and wicked meddling with troubles in which he had no concern. Mrs. Catterick's friends came to condole with her, knowing how strongly she disapproved of her son's politics. Andrew himself was stopped in the street by an old gentleman, who asked him severely what his good father would have thought of such doings, and

advised him, if he must needs be working mischief, to go and speechify elsewhere. The town's one newspaper, which called itself 'independent,' and tried to please everyone, came out with an article vaguely deprecating the interference of outsiders in industrial disputes. Andrew replied in a long letter, printed the following week, wherein he justified himself on high grounds, economical and moral: it was the duty, he maintained, of all enlightened men to use these opportunities for a protest against the grinding tyranny of the present social system. He had deliberately taken off his coat, and was going to work with a full sense of the responsibilities he incurred. He might mention that he had carefully inquired into the state of the mining population in this district, and the results of his inquiries would shortly be made public in one of the leading organs of advanced opinion.

His 'facile pen,' as the local paper would have called it, knocked off a couple of sensational reports, which presently appeared in a London evening journal. Copies were in demand at Mapplebeck, and the county press made its comments, sympathetic or denunciatory. Andrew congratulated himself on the circumstances which had brought him hither just at this time. Mapplebeck would come to regard him as a terrible fellow. He looked impatiently for the actual outbreak of the strike, when, with a little effort, he might play a part of more than local distinction.

Meanwhile Mr. Robert Holdsworth viewed with keen annoyance the pranks of his future relative. This prudent young man by no means relished the thought of celebrating his marriage with Miss Catterick at a moment when Andrew was incurring the odium of all well-to-do people in the district. He came over to talk plainly of the matter; and Bertha, distressed by his grave representations, was driven to propose that their wedding should be put off till the next year.

‘It’s no use saying anything to Andrew; he is really very selfish. I think mother ought to tell him that we can’t have him here any longer.’

‘So do I,’ replied Holdsworth emphatically. ‘His behaviour is simply monstrous. Your mother will feel the effects of it for long enough.’

Andrew was away, carrying the fiery cross. When he returned, late at night, mother and sister united in a very strong appeal to him. Couldn’t he see the inconvenience, to say the least, that he was causing them? If he was well enough to go about making speeches, had he not better return to London?

‘I am obliged to stay here,’ answered the journalist, with forbearance. ‘Not only my interest, but my duty, forbids me to turn back from the work I have undertaken. But, of course, I need not remain in this house. I admit all you urge, and to-morrow I will look about for a lodging.’

To this Mrs. Catterick could not assent, and the discussion was prolonged to an unheard-of hour. Andrew, when he understood the difficult position in which his sister was placed, held firm to his self-denying ordinance ; he would forego the comforts of home, and lodge somewhere in the neighbourhood. This step would declare to all and sundry that the ladies dissociated themselves from his obnoxious principles.

And on the morrow the change was made. Andrew felt a glow of conscious virtue ; no one could say that he had not behaved with scrupulous honour. He wrote a touching letter to Holdsworth, explaining his sacrifice, and enlarging upon its meritorious features. The solicitor replied in a line or two of formal civility.

Catterick had aptitude for the work of an agitator. His harangues were not merely fluent and spirited, they testified to a sincerity of feeling with which the casual observer would not have credited Andrew. Himself acquainted with hardships, he did, in fact, sympathise with the employed as against the capitalist. His whole bent of mind engaged him to the democratic standpoint ; his interests were all in combative modernism. Robert Holdsworth, deeming him a noisy charlatan, did justice neither to his abilities nor to the motives of his conduct ; yet there was a weak point in Andrew which the lawyer accidentally discovered, and which he resolved to attack

by an ingenious stratagem. Talking confidentially of her brother, Bertha had mentioned that in boyhood he was anything but remarkable for courage.

‘If there’s any rioting,’ she said, ‘I’m quite sure he’ll get out of the way. It’s a pity he can’t have a good fright. He would soon find that business called him to London.’

Holdsworth said little, but he reflected and schemed.

A few days after this Andrew received a letter addressed in a rude, sprawling hand, the writing of someone who barely knew how to hold a pen. The contents were with difficulty decipherable, but seemed to run thus :

‘Mr. Caterikk, us three chaps as made up our moind to-night to wright to yo we work at a pit and weeve gotten wives and childer and we dont want to see them go hungry weer badly of as it is and we dont bileve a strike will mak it better so us chaps as mad up oor mind to give yo fare warning if the lads about here cum out on strike yol hear from us were not thretning yor life but well give yo the best threshin yo iver had sens yo was born thers three sticks redy and ef we go to jale for it thell be more bread fort wives and childer so look out.’

This same morning Andrew learnt that in a neighbouring county the strike had already begun. In a day or two great numbers of colliers would have left their work, and all but certainly those round

about Mapplebeck would join in the movement. They were a particularly rough lot of men, and, as he well knew, eager to try their strength with the masters. He knew equally well that individuals among them, looking forward to short commons and fireless hearths, secretly cursed the agencies which threw them out of employment ; and this letter from the nameless trio seemed to him an undoubtedly genuine threat. Its very moderation (he had only to fear bruises and indignity) was an alarming feature of the menace. For a long time he sat with the letter in his hand thinking anxiously.

The post-mark was Mapplebeck. Impossible to determine to what pit these three men belonged. His mind's eye surveyed whole crowds of grimy faces, and everywhere saw hostility in the white upturned orbs.

First came the natural impulse to make public his danger. It would be a proud moment. 'Behold this infamous production ! Do you imagine that a base threat such as this can for a moment shake my purpose ? See, I tear it into fragments, and scatter it to the winds !' Acquaintances in Mapplebeck would admire his scornful indifference, or, at all events, talk the more about him. 'He receives threatening letters. Hired ruffians have vowed to beat him within an inch of his life.' But was he actually indifferent ? When all the pitmen of the locality were idle, would he care to walk about by-ways, or go

home to his lodgings on a dark night? He hoped to make a figure during the strike, and to send journalistic correspondence to London; he must move freely hither and thither at all hours, affording his enemies abundant opportunity to waylay him. Well, was it not what a public man had to expect? Who that takes part in industrial warfare can feel secure from outrage? If the fellows thrashed him, they were not likely to escape, and here again would be a splendid advertisement.

Yes; but the thrashing itself. Three sturdy colliers, armed with three big sticks, and only inclined to stop short of murder. His bones would ache for some time, be sure of it. He had never undergone a thrashing, not even as a boy. He had never fought; for, as his sister truly affirmed, physical courage was not his strong point. As he thought and thought, the drops came out upon his forehead.

For the present he would keep this letter in his pocket, and speak of it to no one.

He went into the town, and kept an appointment with a fellow-worker in the bar-room of the principal hotel. 'Grand news!' exclaimed his friend, a provincial journalist without employment. At Baker's Pits that morning a notice was posted which would be sure to bring matters to a head: before evening the men would all be out. They must go at once——

Andrew felt a chill run down his back.

'It's a confounded nuisance!' he began blusteringly. 'I have a letter from my editor. He wants me to go at once to the Clegg Valley district. I've half a mind to wire back that I must see it out here.'

But the friend thought this imprudent. His own ambitions clashed somewhat with Catterick's, and he would not be sorry to see the fiery orator depart for the Clegg Valley or elsewhere.

'It's a beastly nuisance!' repeated Andrew, wondering how soon after the declaration of a strike at Baker's Pits his bludgeon-armed foes would start on the war-path. Perhaps this very evening would see them lying in wait for him. 'I think I shall stay.'

He drank a glass of whisky, but it had no effect whatever upon his state of mind. Ah!—he said to himself—this was manifestly the result of nervous breakdown. He had not recovered from his illness; he had been over-exciting himself when what he needed was repose. Why, his limbs trembled under him! No, no; he was not such a poltroon as all that! In reasonable health he could have faced the peril, which, after all, might be imaginary. Those fellows would not dare to attack him—why, it would be as much as their lives were worth! But a dark night—the lonely road near his lodgings—faces masked—they might, perhaps, do it with impunity. Cold sweat again started on his forehead.

And all the time his friend was counselling him not to neglect the editor's instructions.

'My people at home yonder,' said Andrew with a smile, 'would be glad enough if I took myself off. Perhaps I owe it to them to make the sacrifice. I must think it over quietly for a few minutes. You go over to Pit Row. If I don't come presently you shall hear from me.'

He sat in the hotel for nearly an hour, and only strangers entered. At length appeared a shopkeeper with whom he was slightly acquainted.

'Well, Mr. Catterick, I suppose this is a great day for you? I hear that Baker's men have come out.'

Andrew smiled, but could not at once reply.

'Sure of it?' fell from his lips, when he had moistened them.

'It's the talk in the town, at all events. And I dare say you know more about it than most people.'

Andrew rose, nodded, and left the hotel.

He walked quickly to his mother's house, and cast many glances about him in the quiet suburban road which led thither. It began to rain, but he did not put up his umbrella. Mrs. Catterick and Bertha were sitting by the fireside, talking about the price of coals; his abrupt entrance—for he walked in without ringing the bell—made them start up in apprehension.

'What has happened? Why do you look so?'

‘Nothing. I’ve done my work, that’s all, and I’m off.’

‘Oh, thank goodness!’ cried Bertha.

‘You know that the colliers are on strike everywhere? Sorry for what it’ll cost you in coals’—he laughed noisily—‘but you mustn’t mind that. I have to rush off to the Clegg Valley—seat of war—telegram from London. Done all that I can here. Bertha, will you do me a kindness?’

‘Certainly.’

‘Take a cab to my lodgings, pack up all my things, leave them at the station cloak-room and keep the receipt till I send for it. It’s all I shall do to catch my train. I thought of staying here to see the fun out, but I should rile an important man if I declined to go. And as you two rejoice, it’s just as well. Explain to Holdsworth, will you? Sorry I couldn’t say good-bye to him. But I *hope* to come down for your wedding, Bertha. Rather I didn’t? Well, well, I quite understand; no harm done. You’ll have broader views some day. Good-bye! Not one minute to lose.’

And away he sped.

In a few days Holdsworth was at Mapplebeck. He listened with a grave smile to the repetition of what Bertha had already told him in a letter.

‘And he went off in a tremendous hurry?’

‘Hardly a dozen words. This

morning he writes from London, and I have to send on his luggage.'

'From London? I'm surprised he could do his work for the newspaper so soon!'

'He says it was too exciting for him—he was falling ill again.'

Holdsworth could not feel absolutely sure that his stratagem had got rid of the firebrand. Andrew's explanations might be all true; yet he disappeared on the very day when that threatening letter must have reached him; and, what was more, on the day when the strike began at Baker's Pits. In any case an odd and amusing coincidence.

AN INSPIRATION

ABOUT six o'clock, just as Harvey Munden came to the end of his day's work, and grew aware that he was hungry, someone knocked at the outer door—a timid knock, signalling a person of no importance. He went to open, and saw a man whose face he remembered.

'What is it this time?' he asked good-humouredly.

'Well, sir, I should like, if you will allow me, to draw your attention to an ingenious little contrivance—an absolute cure for smoky chimneys.'

The speaker seemed to be about forty; he was dressed with painful neatness, every article of his clothing, from hat to boots, exhibiting some trace of repair. He stood with his meagre form respectfully bent, on his drawn features a respectful smile, and prepared to open a small hand-bag—so strikingly new that it put its bearer to shame. Harvey Munden observed him, listened to his exposition, and said at length:

'When do you knock off work?

'Well, sir, this is probably my last call to-day.'

‘Come in for a minute, then. I should like to have a talk with you.’

Respectfully acquiescent, the man stepped forward into the comfortable sitting-room, which he surveyed with timid interest. His host gave him a chair by the fireside, and induced him to talk of his efforts to make a living. Brightened by the cheeriness of the surroundings, and solaced by an unwonted sympathy, the hapless struggler gave a very simple and very lamentable account of himself. For years he had lived on the petty commission of petty sales, sometimes earning two or three shillings a day, but more often reckoning the total in pence.

‘I’m one of those men, sir, that weren’t made to get on in the world. As a lad, I couldn’t stick to anything—couldn’t seem to put my heart into any sort of work, and that was the ruin of me—for I had chances to begin with. I’ve never done anything to be ashamed of—unless it’s idleness.’

‘You are not married?’

His eyes fell, and his smile faded; he shook his head. The other watched him for a moment.

‘Will you tell me your name? Mine is Munden.’

‘Nangle, sir—Laurence Nangle.’

‘Well, Mr. Nangle, will you come and dine with me?’

Abashed and doubtful, the man drew his legs further beneath the chair and twisted his hat. There needed some pressure before he could bring himself

to accept the invitation ; improbable as it seemed, he was genuinely shy ; his stammered phrases and a slight flush on his cheeks gave proof of it.

They descended together to the street, and Munden called a hansom ; ten minutes' drive brought them to the restaurant, where the host made choice of a retired corner, and quietly gave his directions. Nangle's embarrassment being still very observable, Munden tried to put him at ease by talking as to any ordinary acquaintance, of the day's news, of the commonest topics. It was not possible to explain himself to his guest, to avow the thought which had prompted this eccentric behaviour ; Nangle could not but regard him with a certain uneasiness and suspicion ; but by dint of persistence in cheerful gossip he gradually fixed the smile upon the face of his shabby companion, and prepared him to do justice to the repast.

Failure in that respect would not have been due to lack of appetite. When soup was set before him Nangle's lips betrayed their watery eagerness ; his eyes rolled in the joy of anticipation. Obviously restraining himself, and anxious not to discredit his host by any show of ill-breeding, he ate with slow decorum—though his handling of the spoon obeyed nature rather than the higher law. Having paused for a moment to answer some remark of Munden's, he was dismayed by the whisking away of his plate.

‘ But—I—I hadn't finished——’

The waiter could not be called back, and Munden, by treating the incident jocosely, made it contribute to his guest's equanimity. When wine was poured out for him Nangle showed a joyous suffusion over all his changing countenance ; he drew a deep breath, quivered at the lips, and straightened himself.

'Mr. Munden'—this when he had drunk a glass—'it is years since I tasted wine. And ah ! how it does one good ! What medicine is like it ?'

'None that I know of,' jested Harvey, 'though I've had wine uncommonly like medicine.'

Nangle laughed for the first time—a most strange laugh, suggesting that he had lost the habit, and could not hit a natural note. Feeling the first attempt to be a failure, he tried again, and his louder voice frightened him into silence.

'What is your opinion ?' asked Munden, smiling at this bit of character. 'Is it possible for a shy man to overcome the failing, with plenty of practice ?'

'Do you ask that because of anything you have noticed in me ?'

'Well, yes. It rather surprises me, after all your experience, that you are still unhardened. How do you manage to call at people's houses and face all sorts of——'

'Ah ! you may well ask ! Mr. Munden, it's a daily death to me ; I assure you it is. I often stand at a door shaking and trembling, and can scarcely speak when it opens. I'm the last man to succeed in

this kind of thing ; I do it because I can't do anything else. But it's awful, Mr. Munden, awful ; and I get no better. I know men who never feel it ; they'd laugh in my face if I spoke of such a thing. But all my life I've suffered from want of self-confidence. If it hadn't been for that ——'

He broke off to help himself from a dish offered at his shoulder. The waiter's proximity startled him, and for a few moments he ate in silence—ate with manifest hunger, which he did not try to disguise ; for the influences of the fortunate hour had warmed his heart and were giving him courage. Munden set a fair example, himself no despicable trencherman. After an *entrée* of peculiar savour, Nangle found it impossible to restrain his feelings.

'I never in all my life ate anything so good,' he murmured across the table.

Munden observed the growth of a new man, born of succulent food and generous wine. The characteristics of the individual thus called into being promised amusement ; it was clear that they would be amiable and not unrefined. Semi-starvation and a hated employment had not corrupted the original qualities of Laurence Nangle ; rather, these qualities had been frozen over, and so preserved. They were now rapidly thawing, and the process, painful to him at first, grew so enjoyable that delight beamed from his eyes.

At dessert he talked without self-consciousness,

and was led into reminiscence. Munden had chanced to mention that he was a Yorkshireman.

‘And so am I!’ exclaimed Nangle; ‘so am I. But I came away when I was a little lad, and I’ve never been there since. Do you know Colchester? That’s where I grew up and was educated. I hadn’t a bad education; most men would have made more use of it. But something happened when I was a young man—it seemed to floor me, and I’ve never quite got over it.’

‘A love affair, I dare say?’

Nangle looked away and slowly nodded several times. Then he drank with deliberation, and smacked his lips. A glow was deepening on his hollow cheeks.

‘Yes, you are right. I could tell you a strange thing that happened to me only a few days ago. But, first of all, I should like to know—*why* did you ask me to dine with you?’

‘Oh, an inspiration.’

‘You thought I looked hungry. Yes, so I was; and the dinner has done me good. I feel better than I have done for years—for years. I could tell you a strange thing——’

He paused, a shade of troublous agitation passing over the gleam of his countenance. After waiting for a moment Munden asked whether he smoked.

‘When I can afford it, which isn’t very often.’

They rose, and went to the smoking-room.

Nangle's step had the lightness, the spring of recovered youth. He selected a cigar with fastidious appreciation : buoyantly he declared for cognac with the coffee. And presently the stream of his talk flowed on.

‘Yes, I had a very good education at a private school—a commercial school. You don’t know Colchester? I went into the office of a wool-stapler—Cliffe was his name ; our best friend, and always very kind to me. I didn’t get on very well—never was such a fellow for making mistakes and forgetting addresses, and so on. I was an idle young dog, but I meant well—I assure you I meant well. And Mr. Cliffe seemed to like me, and asked me to his house the same as before. I wish he hadn’t ; I should have done better if he’d been a little hard with me. He had a daughter—Ah, well ; you begin to see. When I was one-and-twenty, she was nineteen, and we fell in love with each other. We used to meet in a quiet place just outside the town—you don’t know Colchester, or I could tell you the spot. I happened to be down there a year or two ago, and I went and sat in the old place for a whole day. Ah, well !—Lucy Cliffe ; I’ve only to say the name, and I go back—back—— It makes me young again.’

His eyes grew fixed ; the hand in which he held his cigar fell. A deep sigh, and he continued :

‘I believe her father would have helped us, one

way or another ; but Mrs. Cliffe spoilt all. When it came out, there was a fearful to-do. Lucy was what you may call rich ; at all events, she'd be left comfortably off some day. As for me—what prospects had I ? Mr. Cliffe talked kindly to me, but he had to send me away. He got me a place in London. Lucy wrote me a letter before I went, and said she must obey her parents. We were like each other in that : soft, both of us ; hadn't much will of our own. And so we never saw each other again—not till a few days ago.'

'She married someone else, no doubt ?'

'Yes, she did. And I knew all about it, worse luck ; I'd rather have lost sight of her altogether. She married the brother of a friend of mine ; well, not a friend, but an acquaintance, who was in London when I came, twenty years ago. She married three years after our parting, and I've heard of her from James Dunning (that's her brother-in-law's name) off and on ever since. I used to have a good opinion of Dunning, but I know better now. He's a rough, selfish brute !'

The last words were uttered with startling vehemence. Nangle clenched his fist, and sat stiffly, quivering with excitement. Munden subdued a smile.

'A long time back, nearly four years, this fellow Dunning told me that his brother had just died. Lucy was left with her daughter, the only child she'd

had ; and they lived at Ipswich. Since then, I've met Dunning only once or twice, and when I asked him about Lucy, he just said she was going on as usual, or supposed she was. He told a lie, and I half guess the reason of it. The other day—do you know Prince of Wales Road, Kentish Town ? You've heard of it. Well, I was going along Prince of Wales Road, in the usual business way, and I knocked at the door of a largish, respectable-looking house. The minute I'd knocked the door opened ; it was a lady just coming out—dressed in black. She looked at me, and I looked at her. I had a queer feeling, and there seemed to be something of the same on her side. I was just going to say something, when she asked me who it was I wished to see. I had only to hear her voice, and I knew I wasn't mistaken. But I didn't dare to speak ; I stood staring at her, and she stood just as still. At last I somehow got out a word—" I think you are Mrs. Dunning ?"—" And you," she said, all of a tremble, " you are Laurence Nangle." Then she turned round to the door, and asked me to come in. And we sat down in a dining-room, and began to talk. You can't imagine how I felt. It was like talking in a dream ; I didn't know what I said. Lucy hadn't altered very much—nothing like as much as I should have expected in twenty years. She seemed so young I could hardly believe it. Of course she's only about thirty-eight, and has lived all her life in comfort. But it's wonderful she should have known

me, after all I've gone through. I must seem more like sixty than forty——'

'Not at present,' remarked the listener. And truly, for the warm, animated face before him was that of a comparatively young man.

'Well, I felt bitterly ashamed of myself, dressed as I was, and peddling from house to house. She kept staring at me, as if she couldn't get over her astonishment. Had she never heard of me? I asked. Yes, she had, every now and then. James Dunning had told her I was a commercial traveller, or something of that kind. Then I asked if she was living here, in Kentish Town. Yes, she was; with James Dunning and his wife. "And your daughter as well?" I asked. Then she began to cry, and told me her daughter had been dead for nearly two years, and she was quite alone, but for the Dunnings, who were very kind to her. She had come to live with them after her daughter's death. And she told me her husband had left her very well off, but what was the use of it when all her family was gone?—And just then we were disturbed by some one coming into the room; a flashy sort of young woman, I guessed her to be Dunning's wife, and I was right. Lucy—I can't help calling her Lucy—stood up, and looked nervous; and of course I stood up too. "I didn't know any one was here," said her sister-in-law, looking very hard at me. "It's some one I used to know," said Lucy. "Oh, then I won't intrude."—Lucy

couldn't say any more. She was ashamed of me, after all. But I felt a good deal more ashamed of myself, and I choked something about being in a hurry, and got out of the room. Neither of them tried to stop me. When I'd let myself out at the front door, I walked off like a madman, running into people because I didn't see them, and talking to myself, and going on straight ahead, till I came to my senses somewhere out Hampstead way.'

'I hope that isn't the end of the story,' said Munden, as he cut the tip of a second cigar.

'I only wish it was,' returned his guest, frowning and straightening himself as before. 'Now, you know something about me, Mr. Munden—I mean, you can form some notion of the man I am from what I have told you. And do you think that I could do such a mean thing as go to that lady—her I call Lucy, for old-time sake—in the hope of getting money from her? Do you believe it of me?'

'Assuredly not.'

'I thank you for your saying so. It came about like this. I did a foolish thing. Two days after that meeting I had to be in Kentish Town again, and late in the evening I passed near Prince of Wales Road. Well, I was tempted. I couldn't resist the wish to go by that house where she lives. And when I got near it, in the dark, I stood still; some one was playing a piano inside, and I thought it might be Lucy. I stood for a minute or two—and all at once a man came up

from behind me and stared in my face. James Dunning it was. "Halloa!" he said. "Then it *is* you, Nangle. I just thought it might be. And what are you doing here?" I couldn't understand his way of speaking, and I hadn't any words ready. "Now, look here, Nangle," he went on, drawing me away by the arm; "you've found out that my sister-in-law is living with us. I didn't want you to know, because I couldn't trust you, and after what happened the day before yesterday I see I was right. Of course they told me. Now I want you to understand that my sister-in-law can't be troubled in this way. I suppose you're spying here on the chance that she may come out; I'm glad I happened to find you at it. If you're in low water I don't mind lending you half-a-crown, but you'll keep out of Prince of Wales Road, or I shall know how to deal with you." There, that's what he said to me. I wasn't man enough to strike him as I ought to have done; I've always been poor-spirited. I just told him in a few hot words what I thought of his behaviour, and went off, feeling devilish miserable I can assure you.'

Munden reflected. There was silence for a little.

'Do you suppose,' asked the host at length, 'that Mrs. Dunning—the widowed lady—regarded you with any such suspicion?'

'Not for one moment,' cried Nangle.

'No? and isn't it possible that you misunderstood her when you thought she was ashamed of

you? From what you have told me of her character——’

‘Yes,’ interrupted the other eagerly, ‘no doubt I was wrong in that. She felt like I did—a sort of shame, a sort of awkwardness; but if I had stayed she’d have got over it. I’m sure she would. I was a fool to bolt like that. It gave James Dunning’s wife a chance of thinking of me as her husband does. It’s all my fault.’

‘And another thing. You take it for granted that James Dunning accused you of wanting to beg or borrow from his sister-in-law. Doesn’t it occur to you that he might be afraid of something else—something more serious from his point of view?’

‘I don’t quite understand.’

‘Why, suppose that when the widowed lady talked to him about you she showed a good deal more interest in you than James Dunning approved? Suppose she even asked for your address, or something of that kind?’

Nangle fixed a gaze on the speaker. His eyes widened to express an agitating thought.

‘You think—that— is possible?’

‘Well, not impossible.’

‘And that fellow—is afraid—Lucy might——’

‘Precisely. In all likelihood that would be very disagreeable to Mr. and Mrs. James Dunning. She is a widow in easy circumstances, without children, without near relatives——’

‘You are right!’ murmured Nangle slowly. ‘I see it now. That’s why he has been afraid of me. And he must have had some reason. Perhaps she has spoken of me. It seems impossible—after all these years——’

He sank back, and stared into vacancy with glowing eyes.

‘In your position,’ said Munden, ‘I should take an early opportunity of revisiting Prince of Wales Road.’

‘How *can* I? Think of my poverty! How can you advise such a thing?’

‘It behoves you,’ continued the other, with much gravity, ‘to clear your character in the eyes of that lady. In justice to yourself——’

‘Again you are right! I will go to-morrow.’

‘It seems to me that this is a case for striking while the iron is hot. It’s now only eight o’clock, and give me leave to say that you will never be so able to justify yourself as this evening. A hansom will take you to Kentish Town in half-an-hour.’

Nangle started up—the picture of radiant resolve.

‘I have just half-a-crown in my pocket, and that’s how I’ll use it! Thank you! You have made me see things in a new light. I feel another man! And if I find that what you hinted at is really the case, shall I hesitate out of false shame? Which is better for Lucy: to live with those people, always feeling sad and lonesome, or to find a real home with the

man she loved when she was a girl—the man who has loved her all his life ?’

‘Bravo ! This is the right—the heroic vein.’

In five minutes they had quitted the restaurant. They found a hansom, and, as he leapt into it, Nangle shouted gallantly to the driver : ‘ Prince of Wales Road, Kentish Town ! ’ Impossible to recognise the voice which but two hours since had murmured respectfully at Harvey Munden’s door. ‘ Come and see me to-morrow,’ Munden called to him, and a hand waved from the starting cab.

Munden was entertained, and something more. Partly out of kindness, in part from curiosity, he had given a good dinner to a poor devil oppressed with ills ; he desired to warm the man’s chilly blood and to improve its quality ; he wished to study the effects of such stirring influence in this particular case. And it seemed probable that he had achieved a good deal more than the end in view. It might come to pass that a good-humoured jest would change incalculably the course of two lives.

It happened that on the morrow he was obliged to go out of town. On returning late at night he found in his letter-box a hand-delivered note, with the signature, ‘ Laurence Nangle.’ Only a couple of lines to say that Nangle had called twice, and that he would come again in a day or two. ‘ Yours gratefully,’ he wrote himself, which possibly signified the news Munden hoped for.

Nearly a week went by, and again at six o'clock Munden was summoned to the door by a knock he recognised. There stood Mr. Nangle—*quantum mutatus*! In his hand no commercial bag, but a most respectable umbrella; on his head an irreproachable silk hat; the rest of his equipment in harmony therewith. The disappearance of an uncommonly beard had struck a decade from his apparent age; he held himself with a certain modest dignity, and did not shrink from the scrutiny of astonished eyes.

‘Come in! Delighted to see you.’

He entered, and for a moment seated himself, but his feelings would not allow him to keep a restful position. Starting up again, he exclaimed:

‘Mr. Munden, what can a man say when he’s in debt for all that makes life worth living?’

‘It depends whether the creditor is man or woman.’

‘In my case, it’s both. But if it hadn’t been for you——’

His voice failed him.

‘I was right, was I?’

‘Yes, you were right. I’ll tell you about it. I got out of the cab at the end of Prince of Wales Road, and walked to the house. I knocked at the door. A servant came, and I told her I wished to see Mrs. Dunning—the widow lady. I’d hardly spoken when James Dunning came out of a room; he had heard my voice. “What’s the meaning of

this?" he said in his brutal way, pushing up against me. "Didn't you understand me?" "Yes I did, and better than you think. I have come to see a lady who happens to live in your house——" And just then I saw Lucy herself at the back of the hall. I brushed past Dunning, and went right up to her. "Mrs. Dunning, I wish to speak to you. Will you let me? Or do you want me to be turned out of the house like a beggar?" "No, no!" She was white as a sheet, and held out her hand to me, as if she wanted protection. "It's all a mistake. You must stay—I want you to stay!" James's wife had come forward, and she was staring at me savagely. "Where can we talk in private?" I asked; and I didn't let go Lucy's hand. Then, all of a sudden, Dunning turned about; you never saw such a change in a man. "Why, Lucy, what's the matter? I thought you didn't wish to see Mr. Nangle. You've altogether misled us." I looked at Lucy, and she was going red—and then I saw tears in her eyes. "Go into the drawing-room, Nangle," said Dunning. "It's all a misunderstanding. We must talk it over afterwards." So I went into the room, and Lucy came after me, and I shut the door——'

He stopped with a choke of emotion.

'Excellent, i'faith,' said Munden, beaming.

'Do you suppose,' continued the other, gravely, 'that I could ever have done that if it hadn't been for your dinner? Never! Never! I should have crept

on through my miserable life, and died at last in the workhouse ; when all the time there was a woman whose own happiness depended on a bit of courage in me. She'd never have dared to show a will of her own ; James Dunning and his wife were too strong for her. Cowards, both of us—but I was the worst. And you put a man's heart into me. Your dinner—your wine—your talk ! If I hadn't gone that night, I should never have gone at all—never !'

' I knew that.'

' But what I can't understand is—*why* did you ask me to dine with you ? Why ? It's like what they call the finger of Providence.'

' Yes. As I told you—it was an inspiration.'

THE POET'S PORTMANTEAU

I

THE poet had been nourishing his soul down in Devon. A petty windfall, a minim legacy, which plucked him from scholastic bondage in a London suburb, was now all but consumed. He turned his face once more to the mart of men, strong in the sanguine courage of two-and-twenty. His luggage (the sum total of his personal property, except twenty pounds sterling) consisted of a trunk and a portmanteau. The latter he kept beside him in the railway carriage—a small and very shabby portmanteau, but it guarded the result of ten months' work, the manuscript volume (entitled *The Hermit of the Tor ; and Other Poems*) whereon rested all his hopes. A few articles of clothing and of daily necessity were packed in the same receptacle. On reaching London he would deposit his trunk at the station, and carry the small portmanteau whilst he searched for a temporary lodging.

Green vales and bosky slopes of Devon ; the rolling uplands of Wiltshire ; the streams and heaths and wooded hills of Surrey. It was late autumn, and

the day drew to its close. Through mists of evening a red orb hung huge above the horizon ; it crimsoned and grew lurid, athwart the first driftings of London smoke ; it disappeared amid towers and chimneys and squalor multiform. The poet grasped his portmanteau, and leapt out on to the platform of Waterloo Station.

One cheap room was all he wanted, and as he could not carry his burden very far he turned southward, guided by memory of the gray, small streets off Kennington Road. Twenty minutes' walk brought him into a by-way where every other window offered its card of invitation to wanderers such as he. At this hour of gloom there was little to choose between one house and another. A few paces ahead of him sounded the knock of a telegraph messenger. Where telegrams were delivered there must be, he thought, some measure of civilisation ; so he lingered till the boy had gone away, then directed his steps to that door.

His rat-tat was answered by a young woman, whose personal appearance surprised him. Her features were handsome and intelligent, though scarcely amiable ; her clothing indicated poverty, but was not such as would be worn by a girl of the working class ; her language and manner completed the proof that she was no native of this region. 'Yes,' she said, speaking distantly and nervously, 'a single room was to let, a room up at the top.' The poet, as became a poet, observed with emotional

interest this unexpected figure. Only a wretched little oil-lamp hung in the passage, and he could not see the girl's face very distinctly ; perhaps the first impression of sullenness was a mistake ; it might be only the shrinking self-respect of one whom circumstances had forced into a false position. He noticed that in her hand she held a telegram.

'Would you let me see the room ?'

'Please wait a moment.'

She went upstairs, and soon reappeared with a lighted candle. Leaving his portmanteau, he followed her through the usual stuffy atmosphere to a chamber of the usual dreariness. His attendant placed her candle within the room, then drew back and waited outside on the landing.

'I think this would do. What is the rent ?'

There was hesitation. The poet stepped forward, and endeavoured to discern a face amid the shadows.

'Eight shillings—I think,' he was at length answered.

Ah, then she was not the landlady. Perhaps the daughter of people who had come to grief. He began to speak of details ; she answered shortly, but to his satisfaction.

'I shall be glad to take the room for a week or two. I'll go and bring up my portmanteau.'

'It is usual'—he still could not see the speaker--
'to pay a week's rent in advance.'

'Oh, to be sure.'

Determined to see her face in full light he took up the candle, and stepped with it on to the landing. As if aware of his motive, the girl stood in a retiring attitude ; but she met his gaze, and they looked, for an instant, steadily at each other. She was handsome, but her lips had a hard, defiant expression, and in her eyes he read either the suffering of a womanly nature or the recklessness of one indifferent to all good. Her speech favoured the pleasanter interpretation ; yet, after all, the countenance disturbed rather than attracted him.

An old box stood by the head of the stairs ; on this he placed the candle, and then drew from his pocket the sum he had to pay. The girl thanked him coldly. He ran downstairs, fetched his portmanteau, and put it in a corner of the dark room. Then they again faced each other.

'By-the-bye,' he said, wishing he could draw her into conversation, 'what's the address ? I have come here by mere chance.'

She gave the information as briefly as possible.

'Thank you. Now I must go out and get something to eat.'

The girl would not speak. There was nothing for it but to turn and descend the stairs. She followed, and half-way down her voice stopped him.

'When shall you be back to-night ?'

'Not later than eleven, I think.'

And so they parted, the poet taking a last look at her as he opened the front door.

She had strongly affected his imagination. As he walked towards Westminster, new rhymes and rhythms sang within him to the roaring music of the street. The Devon hermitage was a far, faint memory. London had welcomed him with so sudden a glimpse of her infinite romance that he half repented his long seclusion.

At about the hour he had mentioned he returned to seek a night's rest. Would the same face appear when the door opened? He waited anxiously, and suffered a sad disappointment, for his knock was answered by just the kind of person that might have been expected—the typical landlady of cheap lodgings, a puffy, slatternly woman chewing a mouthful of the supper from which she had risen.

'Good evening,' said the poet, as cheerfully as he could. 'I am your new lodger.'

The woman stared, as if failing to understand him.

'I took a room at the top, early this evening.'

'You've made a mistake. It's the wrong 'ouse.'

'But isn't this——?' he named the address which the girl had given him.

'Yes, that's 'ere.'

'I thought so. I remember the house perfectly. You were out, I suppose. I saw a—a young woman. I paid a week's rent in advance.'

This circumstantial story increased the listener's astonishment. She glared with protuberant eyes, breathed quickly, and gave a snort.

'Well, that's a queer thing. Wait a minute.'

She went upstairs, and could be heard to tap at a door ; but there followed no sound of voices. Then she came down again, and asked for a description of the young woman who had acted as her representative. The poet answered rather vaguely.

'We have somebody of that sort lodgin' 'ere, but she's out. You say you paid eight shillin's ?'

'Yes. And left my portmanteau ; you'll find it upstairs.'

Again the landlady disappeared. When she returned her face exhibited a contemptuous satisfaction.

'There's no portmanty nowheres in *this* 'ouse. I told you you'd made a mistake. Try next door !'

The poet was staggered. Mistaken he could not be ; the little oil-lamp, a dirty engraving on the wall of the passage, remained so clearly in his mind. A shapeless fear took hold upon him.

'Pray let me go up with you to the top room. I *know* this was the house. Let me see the room.'

The woman was impatient and suspicious. At this moment there sounded from the back of the passage a male voice, asking, 'What's up ?' A man came forward ; the difficulty was explained. For a second time the baffled poet essayed a description of the girl he remembered so well.

'He means Miss Rowe,' said the husband. 'She ain't in ? Then you just take a light, and 'ave a good look in her room.'

They went up together to the first floor, and the poet, unable to keep still, followed them at a distance. He was seriously alarmed. If his portmanteau were to be lost—heavens! His poems—his only copy! Some of the shorter ones he could rewrite from memory, but the backbone of his volume, *The Hermit of the Tor*, could not be reproduced. And *how* could the portmanteau have vanished? That girl —— Surely, surely, impossible! Much rather suspect these vulgar people, or someone else of whom he knew nothing.

Man and wife were searching within the room. He heard feminine exclamations and a masculine oath. Unable to control himself he pushed open the door.

'She's took her 'ook,' said the man, looking at him with a grin. 'See—'ere's her tin box—empty! nothing as belongs to her in the room.'

'And owin' a week's rent!' cried his wife. 'I might 'a' known better than to trust her. There wasn't no good in her face. She's sloped with your eight bob and your portmanty, I'll take my hoath!'

The poet seized the candle, and strode up the higher flight of stairs. Yes, there was the old box on the landing; yes, this was the room he had paid for. *Pheu! pheu!*

'Sal!' roared the man's voice, 'ev a look and see if she's laid 'ands on anything of ours!'

The woman yelled at the suggestion, and began a fierce rummage, high and low—

'I can't miss nothin',' she kept shouting. And at length, 'Go and fetch a p'liceman. D' y'ear, Matt? Go and fetch a p'liceman. This 'ere young gent 'll be chargin' us with robbin' him.'

'Where's your receipt for the eight bob?' asked her husband, turning angrily upon the poet.

'I took no receipt.'

'That doesn't sound very likely.'

'Likely or not, it's true,' cried the other, exasperated by this insult added to his misfortune. 'Fetch a policeman, or else I shall. We'll have this investigated.'

'I'll jolly soon do that,' was the man's retort. 'Think you're dealin' with thieves, do you? Begin that kind o' talk, and I'll—— 'Ere, Sal, keep a hey on him whilst I go for the copper.'

What ensued calls for no detailed narrative. Suffice it that by midnight all had been done that could be done in the way of charges, defences, and official interrogation. Later, the poet sat talking with his rough acquaintances in their own parlour. After all, the people had lost nothing but a week's rent, and they were at length brought to some show of sympathy with the stranger so shamefully treated under their roof. He, for his part, decided still to occupy the bedroom, which would be let to him, magnanimously, for seven-and-sixpence: whilst the police were trying to track his plunderer he might as well remain on the spot. At one o'clock he went

gloomily to bed, and in his troubled sleep dreamt that he was chasing that mysterious girl up hill and down dale amid the Devon moorland ; she, always far in advance, held his fated manuscript above her head, and laughed maliciously.

II

ON the eighth anniversary of that memorable day the poet could look back upon his loss with an amused indifference. He was a poet still, but no longer uttered himself in verse. The success of an essay in romantic fiction had shown him how to live by his pen, and a second book made his name familiar 'at all the libraries.' For a man of simple tastes he was in clover. He dwelt among the Surrey hills, and on his occasional visits to London did not seek a lodging in the neighbourhood of Kennington Road.

As for *The Hermit of the Tor*, though often enough he wondered as to its fate, on the whole he was glad it had never been published. To be sure, no publisher would have risked money on it. In his vague recollection, the thing seemed horribly crude ; he remembered a line or two that made him shut his eyes and mutter inarticulately. The lyrics might be passable ; a couple of them, preserved in his mind, had got printed in a magazine some five years ago. One of his ambitions at present was to write a poetical drama, but he merely mused over the selected theme.

He was thus occupied one winter afternoon as he strolled from the outlying cottage, which he had made his home, to the nearest village. A footstep on the hard road caused him to look up, and he saw the postman drawing near. This encounter saved the humble official a half-mile walk ; he delivered a letter into the poet's hands.

A letter redirected by his publishers ; probably the tribute of an admiring reader, such as he had not seldom received of late. With a smile he opened it, and the contents proved to be of more interest than he had anticipated.

'SIR,—I have in my possession a manuscript which bears your name, as that of its author, and dates from some years back. It consists of poetical compositions, the longest of them entitled *The Hermit of the Tor*. I cannot at present explain to you how these papers came into my hands, but I should like to return them to their true owner, and for this purpose I should be glad if you would allow me to meet you, at your own place and time. But for a residence abroad, I should probably have addressed you on the subject long before this, as I find that your name is well known to English readers. Please direct your reply to Penwell's Library, Westbourne Grove, W., and believe me,

'Faithfully yours,

'EUSTACE GREY.'

At the head of the letter there was no address.

'Eustace Grey' sounded uncommonly like a pseudonym. Altogether a very surprising sequel to the adventure of eight years ago. Was the writer man or woman? Impossible to decide from the penmanship, which was bold, careless, indicative of character and of education. As a man, at all events, the mysterious person must be answered, and curiosity permitted no delay. Where should the meeting take place? He had no inclination to breathe the air of London just now, and a journey of twenty miles might fairly be exacted from a correspondent who chose to write in the strain of melodrama. Let 'Eustace Grey' come hither.

With all brevity the poet invited him to take a certain train from Waterloo, which would enable him to reach the cottage at about four in the afternoon, on a specified day.

The appointed hour was just upon nightfall. With blind drawn, lamp lit, and a log blazing in the old fireplace, the poet awaited his visitor, who might or might not come, for no second communication had been received from him. If he came, he would doubtless take a conveyance from the railway station, a mile and a half away; a rumble of wheels would announce him. At a quarter past four no such signal was yet audible, but five minutes later it struck upon the listener's ear. He stood up, and waited in nervous expectancy.

The vehicle stopped by the door; a knock

sounded. A tap at the door of the sitting-room, and there appeared, led by the servant, a tall lady. She was warmly and expensively clad; wraps and furs disguised the outline of her figure, and allowed but an imperfect view of her features. In a moment, however, she threw some of the superfluities aside, and stood gazing at the poet, who saw now that she was a woman of not more than thirty, with a strong, handsome face, and a form that pleased his eye. She offered a hand.

‘If I had known——’ he began, breaking the silence with voice apologetic. But she interrupted him.

‘You wouldn’t have brought me all this way. Never mind. It’s better. I shall be glad to have made a pilgrimage to the home of the celebrated author.’

Her language and utterance certainly did not lack refinement, but she spoke with more familiarity than the poet was prepared for. He judged her a type of the woman that lives in so-called smart society. His pulses had a slight flutter; in observing and admiring her he all but forgot the strange history in which she was concerned.

‘The cab will wait for me,’ she continued, ‘so I mustn’t be long.’

‘I’m sorry for that,’ replied the poet, so far imitating her as to talk like an old acquaintance. ‘You shall have a cup of tea at once.’ He rang a hand-bell. ‘You’ve had a cold journey.’

Whilst he spoke he saw her lay upon the table a rolled packet, which was doubtless his manuscript. Then she seated herself in an easy chair by the fireside, glanced round the room, smiled at her own thoughts, and met his look with a steady gaze.

'Are you Eustace Grey?' he inquired, taking a seat over against her.

'I chose the name at random. My own doesn't matter. I am only an—an intermediary, as you would say in a book.'

He searched her countenance closely, persistently, without regard to good manners. It was no common face. Had he ever seen it before? It did not charm him, but decidedly it affected his imagination. This could not be an ordinary woman of fashion. He knew little of the wealthy world, but his experience of life assured him that 'Eustace Grey' was not now for the first time engaged in transactions which had a savour of romance.

'Those are my verses?' He pointed towards the table.

'Exactly as they left your hands,' she answered calmly.

'Or my portmanteau, rather.'

'Yes, your portmanteau.' She accepted the correction with a smile.

Surely he had *not* seen her face before? Surely he had never heard her voice? At this moment the servant entered with a tea-tray. The poet stood up and

waited upon his visitor. As soon as the door had closed she said :

‘ You are not married ? ’

‘ No—unhappily.’

‘ Please don’t add the word in compliment to me. I’m delighted to know that you keep your independence. Don’t marry for a long time. And you live here always ? ’

‘ Most of the year.’

‘ Ah, you are not like ordinary men.’

‘ Nor you—I was thinking—like ordinary women.’

‘ Well, no ; I suppose not.’ She looked at him with a peculiar frankness, with a softer expression than her face had yet shown, and, whilst speaking, she drew off her left-hand glove. A peculiarity in the movement excited her companion’s attention ; he saw that she wore two rings, one of them of plain gold.

‘ I like your books,’ was her next remark.

‘ I’m glad of it.’

‘ Have you good health ? You look rather pale—for one who lives in the country.’

‘ Oh, I am very well.’

‘ To be sure you have brains, and use them. It’s pleasant to know that there *are* such men.’ She sipped her tea. ‘ But time is going, and the driver and horse will freeze.’

‘ I have no stable,’ said the poet, ‘ but the man

can sit by the kitchen fire and have some ale. Anything to make your visit longer.'

'Complimentary ; but I am here on business.' She had grown more distant. 'Of course, you want to know how those papers came into my hands. I'll tell you, and make a short story of it. I had them a year or two ago from a friend of mine—a girl, who died. She had stolen them.'

The listener gave a start, and looked at the face before him more intently than ever. He detected no shrinking, but a certain suggestion of defiance.

'She was a girl who did what is supposed to be the privilege of men—sowed wild oats. She came to an end of her money, and found herself in a poor lodging—somewhere in the south of London—'

'Off Kennington Road,' murmured the poet.

'Very likely. I forget. She had got rid of all the clothing she could spare. She was a week behind with her rent. Another day or two, and she would starve. No way of earning money, it seemed. Poor thing, she thought herself something of an artist, and went about offering drawings to the papers and the publishers ; but I'm afraid the work was poor to begin with, and got poorer as *she* did. The desperate state of things made her fierce and ready for anything.

'However, she had a girl friend who wrote to her now and then, addressing to the name she had assumed. This friend lived far away in the north, and earned her own living. One afternoon, just when

things were at the blackest, there arrived a telegram : " If you come at once, I can promise you employment. Start immediately." All very well, but how was she to raise fifteen shillings or so for her journey ? Now it happened that at this moment she was the only person in the house. The landlady, she knew, would be away for two or three hours ; the husband wouldn't be home till eight (it was now five), and another lodger had just gone out. I mention this—you know why. Whilst she was still standing with the telegram in her hand, some one knocked. She opened the door. A young man, carrying a portmanteau—a very nice-looking young man, who spoke softly and pleasantly—had come for a lodging ; he wanted one room. She let him in, and took him upstairs.'

' She did,' murmured the poet, his eyes straying about the room.

' And you remembered what followed ? '

' Remarkably well. I can see—well, I'm not quite sure ; but I *think* I can see her face.'

' Can you ? Well, until you had left the house her intention was perfectly honest. She thought that, in return for her service in letting the room the landlady might perhaps lend her money for the journey north, and trust for repayment. But as soon as you had gone the devil began whispering. Your money lay in her hand. Your portmanteau contained things that would sell or pawn. The chance of a loan from the landlady was dreadfully

slight. You see? A man of imagination ought to understand.'

'I do—perfectly.'

'She tried her keys on the portmanteau. No use. But it was old and shaky. She prised open the lock. What she found disappointed her; it wouldn't fetch many shillings. But she had taken the fatal step. No staying in the house now. She put on her hat and jacket, stuffed into her pockets the few things still left to her, caught up the portmanteau—and away!'

The poet could not help a laugh, and his companion joined in it. But she was agitated, and her mirth had not a genuine ring.

'And how much were my poor old rags worth?'

'Five shillings.'

'By Jove! You don't say so!'

'She pawned them in a street somewhere north of the Strand. But this gave her only thirteen shillings. Then she sold the portmanteau; that brought eighteen-pence. Fourteen shillings and sixpence. Next she sold or pawned her jacket; it brought three shillings.'

'Poor girl! With such a journey before her on a cold night! But the poems?'

'She looked at them, and was on the point of throwing them away, but she didn't. She read some of them in the train that night. And oh—oh—oh! how ashamed of herself she was then and for many a

long day ! So much ashamed that she couldn't even feel afraid.'

'And she got the employment promised?'

'Yes. And sowed no more wild oats. It was a poor living, but she struggled on—until by chance she met a very rich man, who took a fancy to her. She didn't care for him. In her life she had only seen one man who really attracted her, but—well, she made up her mind to marry the rich man ; and then—she died. I knew her story already, and at her death she left your poems in my care, to be restored if possible. There they are.'

With a careless gesture she rose.

'You are not going yet,' exclaimed the poet.

'I am ; this moment. I have a train to catch.'

'Hang the train ! There's one at about nine o'clock. I shall send away your cab.'

She looked at him very coldly.

'I am going at once, and you will be good enough to stay where you are.'

'You won't even tell me your name?'

'Not even that. Good-bye, poet !'

She gave him her hand. Holding it, he gazed at her with bright eyes.

'I do remember your friend's face. And how I wish she could have spoken to me that night !'

'The ideal is never met in life,' she answered softly.

'Put it into your books—which I shall always read.'

The door closed, and he heard the cab rumble away.

THE DAY OF SILENCE

FOR a week the mid-day thermometer had marked eighty or more in the shade. Golden weather for those who could lie and watch the lazy breakers on a rocky shore, or tread the turf of deep woodland, or drink from the cold stream on some mountain side. But the by-ways of Southwark languished for a cloud upon the sun, for a cooling shower, or a breath from its old enemy, the east. The cry of fretful children sounded ceaselessly. Every window was wide open ; women who had nothing to do lounged in the dusk of doorways and in arched passages, their money all gone in visits to the public-house. Ice-cream men found business at a standstill ; it was Friday, and the youngsters' ha'pence had long ago come to an end. Labourers who depended upon casual employment chose to sleep through the thirsty hours rather than go in search of jobs ; a crust of bread served them for a meal. They lay about in the shadowed spots, shirt and trousers their only costume, their shaggy heads in every conceivable attitude of repose.

Where the sun fell the pavement burned like an

oven floor. An evil smell hung about the butchers' and the fish shops. A public-house poisoned a whole street with alcoholic fumes ; from sewer-grates rose a miasma that caught the breath. People who bought butter from the little dealers had to carry it away in a saucer, covered with a piece of paper, which in a few moments turned oily dark. Rotting fruit, flung out by costermongers, offered a dire regale to little ragamuffins prowling like the cats and dogs. Babies' bottles were choked with thick-curdling milk, and sweets melted in grimy little hands.

Among the children playing in a court deep down by Southwark Bridge was one boy, of about seven years old, who looked healthier and sweeter than most of his companions. The shirt he wore had been washed a week ago, and rents in it had obeyed the needle. His mother-made braces supported a pair of trousers cut short between the knee and ankle, evidently shaped out of a man's garment. Stockings he dispensed with ; but his boots were new and strong. Though he amused himself vigorously, he seemed to keep cool ; his curly hair was not matted with perspiration, like that of the other youngsters ; the open shirt—in this time of holiday coat and waistcoat were put away to be in good condition when school began again—showed a body not ill-nourished, and his legs were of sturdy growth. A shouting, laughing, altogether noisy little chap. When his shrill voice rang out, it gave his playmates the

word of command ; he was ready, too, with his fists when occasion offered. You should have seen him standing with arms akimbo, legs apart, his round little head thrown back and the brown eyes glistening in merriment. Billy Burden, they called him. He had neither brother nor sister—a fortunate thing, as it enabled his parents to give him more of their love and their attention than would have been possible if other mouths had clamoured for sustenance. Mrs. Burden was very proud of him, and all the more decent women in the court regarded Billy with affectionate admiration. True, he had to be kept in order now and then, when he lost his temper and began to punch the heads of boys several years older than himself ; but his frank, winsome face soon overcame the anger of grown-up people.

His father, Solomon Burden by name, worked pretty regularly at a wharf on the Middlesex side, and sometimes earned as much as a pound a week. Having no baby to look after, his mother got a turn of work as often as possible, chiefly at warehouse-cleaning and the like. She could trust little Billy to go to school and come home at the right time ; but holidays, when he had to spend the whole day out-of-doors, caused her some anxiety, for the child liked to be off and away on long explorations of unknown country—into Lambeth, or across the river to the great London streets, no distance tiring him. Her one fear was lest he should be run over. To-day he

had promised to keep well within reach of home, and did so. At Mrs. Burden's return from a job in Waterloo Road he was found fast asleep on the landing. She bent over him, and muttered words of tenderness as she wiped his dirty face with her apron.

Of course, they had only one room—an attic just large enough to hold a bed, a table, and Billy's little mattress down on the floor in a corner. Their housekeeping was of the simplest: a shelf of crockery, two saucepans, and a frying-pan supplied Mrs. Burden with all she needed for the preparation of meals. Apparel was kept in a box under the bed, where also was the washing-basin. Up to a year ago they had had a chest of drawers; but the hard winter had obliged them to part with this.

When Mrs. Burden unlocked and opened the door, the air within was so oppressive that she stood for a moment and drew a deep breath. The sound of the key wakened Billy, who sprang up joyfully.

'Ain't it been 'ot again, mummy!' the boy exclaimed. 'There was a 'bus-horse fell dead. Ben Wilkins seen it!'

'I a'most feel as if I could drop myself,' she answered, sinking upon the bed. 'There ain't no hair to breathe: I wish we wasn't under the roof.'

She stood up again and felt the ceiling—it was some six inches above her head.

'My gracious alive! It's fair bakin'.'

'Let me feel—let me feel!'

She lifted him in her arms, and Billy proved for himself that the plaster of the ceiling was decidedly warm. Nevertheless, sticks had to be lighted to boil the kettle. Father might come home any moment, and he liked his cup of tea.

As she worked about, the woman now and then pressed a hand to her left side, and seemed to breathe with difficulty. Sweat-drops hung thick upon her face, which was the colour of dough. On going downstairs to draw water for the kettle she took a quart jug, and after filling this she drank almost the whole of it in one long draught. It made her perspire still more freely ; moisture streamed from her forehead as she returned to the upper story, and on arriving she was obliged to seat herself.

‘Do you feel bad, mummy?’ asked the child, who was accustomed to these failings of strength when his mother came home from a day’s work.

‘I do, Billy, hawful bad ; but it’ll go in a minute. Put the kittle on—there’s a good boy.’

She was a woman of active habits, in her way a good housewife, loving moderate cleanliness and a home in order. Naturally, her clothing was coarse and begrimed ; she did the coarsest and grimest of work. Her sandy hair had thinned of late ; it began to show the scalp in places. There was always a look of pain on her features, and her eyes were either very glassy or very dull. For thirty years—that is, since she was ten years old—struggle with poverty

had been the law of her life, and she remained victorious ; there was always a loaf in the house, always an ounce of tea ; her child had never asked in vain for the food demanded by his hearty appetite. She did not drink ; she kept a guard upon her tongue in the matter of base language ; esteemed comely by her equals, she had no irregularity of behaviour wherewith to reproach herself. Often enough at variance with her husband, she yet loved him ; and Billy she loved more.

About seven o'clock the father came home ; he clumped heavily up the stairs, bent his head to pass the doorway, and uttered a good-natured growl as he saw the table ready for him.

' Well, Bill, bwoy, can you keep warm ? '

' Sh' think so,' the child answered. ' Mummy's bad again with the 'eat. There ain't no air in this bloomin' 'ouse.'

' Kick a 'ole in the roof, old chap ! '

' Wish I could ! '

Solomon flung off his coat, and turned up the sleeves of his shirt. The basin, full of water, awaited him ; he thrust his great head into it and made a slop over the floor. Thereat Mrs. Burden first looked, then spoke wrathfully. As his habit was, her husband retorted, and for a few minutes they wrangled. But it was without bitterness, without vile abuse. Domestic calm as understood by the people who have a whole house to themselves is impossible

in a Southwark garret ; Burden and his wife were regarded by the neighbours, and rightly, as an exemplary pair ; they never came to blows, never to curses, and neither of them had ever been known to make a scene in public.

Burden had a loud, deep voice ; whether he spoke angrily or gently, he could be heard all over the house and out in the court. Impossible for the family to discuss anything in private. But, like all their neighbours, they accepted such a state of things as a matter of course. Everybody knew all about everybody else ; the wonder was when nothing disgraceful came to listening ears.

‘ Say, Bill,’ remarked the man, when he had at length sat quietly down to his tea, ‘ how would you like to go in a boat to-morrow afternoon ? ’

‘ Shouldn’t I just ! ’

‘ Old Four-arf is goin’ to have a swim,’ Burden explained to his wife ; ‘ wants me to go with him ; and I feel it ’ud do me good, weather like this. Bunker’s promised him a boat at Blackfriars Bridge. Shall I take the kid ? ’

Mrs. Burden looked uneasy, and answered sharply.

‘ What’s the good o’ asking when you’ve spoke of it before the boy ? ’

‘ Well, why shouldn’t I take him ? You might come along, too : only we’re a-goin’ to strip up beyond Chelsea.’

This was kindness, and it pacified the wife.

'I couldn't go before six,' she said.

'What's the job?'

'Orfices near St. Bride's—Mrs. Robins wants 'elp; she sent her Sally over to me this mornin'. It'll be an all-day job; eighteen-pence for me.'

'Bloomin' little, too. You ain't fit for it this weather.'

'I'm all right!'

'No, you ain't. Billy just said as you'd been took bad, an' I can see it in yer eyes. Have a day at 'ome, mother.'

'Don't you go fidgetin' about me. Take Billy, if you like; but just be careful. No puttin' of him into the water.'

'Tain't likely.'

'Cawn't I bathe, dad?' asked Billy.

'Course you cawn't. We're goin' to swim in the middle of the river, Jem Pollock an' me—where it's hawful deep, deep enough to drownd you fifty times over.'

'The other boys go bathin',' Billy remonstrated.

'Dessay they do,' cried his mother; 'but you won't—so you know! If you want for to bathe, arst Mrs. Crowther to lend you her washin'-tub, and fill it with water. That won't do you no 'arm, and I don't mind if you make a bit of a splash, s'long as you don't wet the bed through.'

After all it was a home, a nesting place of human affections—this attic in which the occupants had

scarcely room to take half-a-dozen steps. Father, mother, and child, despite the severing tendency of circumstances, clung together about this poor hearth, the centre of their world. In the strength of ignorance, they were proof against envy ; their imaginations had never played about the fact of social superiority, which, indeed, they but dimly understood. Burden and his wife would have been glad, now and then, of some addition to the weekly income ; beyond that they never aspired. Billy, when he had passed the prescribed grades of school, would begin to earn money : it did not much matter how : only let the means be honest. To that the parents looked forward with anticipation of pride. Billy's first wages ! It would warm their hearts to see the coins clutched in his solid little fist. For this was he born, to develop thews and earn wages.

It did not enter into their conception of domestic happiness to spend the evening at home, sitting and talking together. They had very little to say : their attachment was not vocal. Besides, the stifling heat of the garret made it impossible to rest here until the sun had long set. So, when tea was finished, Billy ran down again into the street to mingle with his shouting comrades ; Mrs. Burden found a seat on the doorstep, where she dozed awhile, and then chatted with bare-armed women ; and Solomon sauntered forth for his wonted stroll 'round the 'ouses.' At ten o'clock the mother took a walk to the neighbouring

beerhouse and returned with a 'pot'—that is to say, a quart—of 'four ale,' which she and Solomon drank for supper. The lad was lying sound asleep on his mattress, naked but for the thin shirt which he wore day and night ; the weather made bed-clothes a superfluity.

Saturday morning showed a change of sky. There were clouds about, and a wind blew as if for rain. At half-past six Solomon was ready to start for work. Billy still slept, and the parents subdued their voices lest they should wake him.

'If it's wet,' said Mrs. Burden, 'you won't go on the river—will you?'

'Not if it's thorough wet. Leave the key with Billy, and if we go you'll find it on the top of the door.'

He set forth as usual : as he had done any day these eight years, since their marriage. Word of parting seemed unnecessary. He just glanced round the room, and with bent head passed on to the landing. His wife did not look after him ; she was cutting bread and butter for Billy. Solomon thought only of the pleasant fact that his labour that day ended at one o'clock, and that in the afternoon he would perhaps have a swim. Mrs. Burden, who had suffered a broken night, looked forward with dreary doggedness to ten hours or more of scrubbing and cleaning, which would bring in eighteen-pence. And little Billy slept the sleep of healthy childhood.

By mid-day the clouds had passed, but the heat of the sun was tempered ; broad light and soft western breeze made the perfection of English summer. This Saturday was one of the golden days of a year to be long remembered.

When he came home from work, Solomon found Billy awaiting him, all eagerness. They went up to the attic, and ate some dinner which Burden had brought in his pocket—two-pennyworth of fried fish and potatoes, followed by bread and cheese. A visit to the public-house, where Billy drank from his father's pewter, and they were ready to start for Blackfriars Bridge, where Solomon's friend, Jem Pollock—affectionately known by the name of his favourite liquor, 'Four-half'—had the use of a boat belonging to one Thomas Bunker, a lighterman. It was not one of the nimble skiffs in which persons of a higher class take their pleasure upon the Thames, but an ungainly old tub, propelled by heavy oars. Solomon and his friend, of course, knew that the tide would help them upwards ; it wanted about an hour to flood. He was a jovial fellow, this Jem Pollock, unmarried, and less orderly in his ways of life than Sol Burden ; his nickname did him no injustice, for whenever he had money he drank. A kindly temper saved him from the worst results of this bibulous habit ; after a few quarts of ale he was at his best, and if he took more it merely sent him to sleep. When Solomon and Billy found him on the stairs at

the south side of the bridge he had just taken his third pint since dinner, and his red, pimply face beamed with contentment.

‘Come along there!’ he roared from below. ‘Brought that bloomin’ big son of yours for ballast, Sol?’

‘He can steer, can Bill.’

‘He won’t ‘ave a chawnce. There ain’t no bloomin’ rudder on this old ship.’

Billy stepped into the boat, and his father followed; but their friend was not yet ready to depart. The cause of his delay appeared when a lad came running down the stairs with a big jar and a tin mug.

‘You don’t s’ppose I’m a-goin’ without a drop o’ refreshment,’ Pollock remarked. ‘It’s water, this is; the best supplied by the Lambeth Water Company. I’ve took the pledge.’

This primitive facetiousness helped them merrily off. Billy sat in the stern; the men each took an oar; they were soon making good way towards Westminster.

Their progress was noisy: without noise they could not have enjoyed themselves. The men’s shouts and Billy’s shrill pipe were audible on either bank. Opposite the Houses of Parliament they exchanged abusive pleasantries with two fellows on a barge; bellowing was kept up until the whole distance between Lambeth Bridge and that of Westminster taxed their lungs. At Vauxhall Jem

Pollock uncorked his jar and poured out a mugful of tawny ale, vastly to the boy's delight, for Billy had persisted in declining to believe that the vessel contained mere water. All drank. Solomon refused to let Billy have more than half a mug, to the scorn of Jem Pollock, who maintained that four-ale never did anything but good to man, woman, or babe.

At Chelsea the jar was again opened. This time Pollock drank an indefinite number of mugs, and Solomon all but quarrelled with him for continuing to tempt Billy. The child had swallowed at least a pint, and began to show the effect of it : he lay back in the stern, laughing to himself, his eyes fixed on the blue sky.

A sky such as London rarely knows : of exquisite purity—a limpid sapphire, streaked about the horizon with creamy cloudlets. All the smoke of the city was borne eastward ; the zenith shone translucent as over woodland solitudes. The torrid beams of the past week were forgotten ; a mild and soothing splendour summoned mortals to come forth into the ways of summer and be glad.

With the last impulse of the flowing tide they reached the broad water beyond Battersea Bridge, where Solomon began to prepare himself for a delicious plunge. The boat could not be left to Billy alone ; Pollock was content to wait until Burden had had the first swim. Quickly stripped, the big-limbed fellow stood where his boy had been

sitting, and of a sudden leapt headlong. Billy yelled with delight at the great splash, and yelled again triumphantly when his father's head rose to the surface. Solomon was a fair swimmer, but did not pretend to great achievements ; he struck out in the upward direction and swam for about a quarter of a mile, the boat keeping along with him ; then he was glad to catch hold of the stern. Pollock began to fling off his clothes.

‘ My turn, old pal ! ’ he shouted. ‘ Tumble in, an’ let’s have a feel of the coolness.’

Solomon got into the boat, and sat naked at one of the oars, Billy managing the other. Five minutes saw Jem back again : he had wallowed rather alarmingly, a result of the gallon or two of ale which freighted him. Then Burden took another plunge. When he had swum to a little distance, Pollock whispered to the boy :

‘ Like to have a dip, Bill ? ’

‘ Shouldn’t I just ! But I can’t swim.’

‘ What’s the odds ? Go over the side, an’ I’ll ’old you by the ’ands. Orff with yer things sharp, afore yer fawther sees what we’re up to.’

Billy needed no second invitation. In a minute he had his clothes off. Pollock seized him by both arms and let him down over the side of the boat. Solomon swam ahead, and, as the tide had ceased to drift the boat onwards, he was presently at some distance. With firm grip, Pollock bobbed the child

up and down, the breadth of the tub allowing him to lean cautiously without risk.

Then the father turned to look, and saw what was going on. He gave a terrific shout.

‘Damn your eyes, Jem! Pull him in, or I’ll——’

‘Old yer jaw,’ roared the other, laughing. ‘He’s all right. Let the kid enjoy hisself—cawn’t yer?’

Solomon struck out for the boat.

‘He’s a-comin’!’ said Pollock, all but helpless with half-drunken laughter.

‘Pull me in!’ said the child, fearful of his father’s wrath. ‘Pull me up!’

And at the same moment he made an effort to jump upon the gunwale. But Jem Pollock also had bent forward, and the result of the two movements was that the man overbalanced himself. He fell plump into the water and sank, Billy with him. From Burden sounded a hoarse cry of agony. Already tired with swimming, the terrified man impeded himself instead of coming on more quickly; he splashed and struggled, and again his voice sounded in a wild shout for help.

There was a boat in sight, but far off. On the Battersea side a few people could be seen; but they had not yet become aware of what had happened. From the other bank no aid could be expected.

Pollock came to the surface and alone. He thought only of making for the boat, as the one way of saving Billy, for he had no skill in supporting

another person whilst he himself swam. But the stress of the moment was too much for him : like Burden, he lost his head, and by clutching at the boat pulled it over, so that it began to fill. A cry, a heartrending scream, from the helpless child, who had just risen, utterly distracted him ; as the boat swamped, he clung madly to it ; it capsized, and he hung by the keel.

Billy was being wafted down the river. Once or twice his little head appeared above the water, and his arms were flung up. The desperate father came onwards, but slowly ; fear seemed to have unstrung his sinews, and he struggled like one who is himself in need of assistance. Once more his voice made itself heard ; but Pollock, who was drifting with the boat, did not answer. And from the drowning child there came no sound.

A steamer was just putting in at Battersea pier—too far off to be of use. But by this time some one on the bank of the old church had seen the boat bottom upwards. An alarm was given.

Too late, save for the rescue of Jem Pollock. Burden had passed the boat, and was not far from the place where his child had gone down for the last time ; with ordinary command of his strength and skill he might easily have kept afloat until help neared him ; but he sank. Only his lifeless body was recovered.

And Billy—poor little chap—disappeared alto-

gether. The seaward-rushing Thames bore him along in its muddy depths, hiding him until the third day ; then his body was seen and picked up not far from the place whence he had started on his merry excursion.

This disaster happened about four of the clock. Two hours later, Mrs. Burden, having done her day's work and received her pay, moved homeward.

Since noon she had been suffering greatly ; whilst on her knees, scrubbing floors and staircases, she had several times felt herself in danger of fainting ; the stooping posture intensified a pain from which she was seldom quite free ; and the heat in this small-windowed warehouse, crowded among larger buildings in an alley off Fleet Street, was insufferably oppressive ; once or twice she lay flat upon the boards, panting for breath. It was over now : she had earned the Sunday's dinner, and could return with the feeling of one who has done her duty.

On Monday she would go to Guy's Hospital and get something for that pain. Six months had passed since her last visit to the doctor, whose warnings she had heeded but little. It won't do to think too much of one's ailments. But they must give her a good large bottle of medicine this time, and she would be careful to take it at the right hours.

She came out into St. Bride's Churchyard, and was passing on towards Fleet Street when again the anguishing spasm seized upon her. She turned and

looked at the seats under the wall of the church, where two or three people were resting in the shadowed quiet. It would be better to sit here for a moment. Her weak and weary limbs bore her with difficulty to the nearest bench, and she sank upon it with a sigh.

The pain lasted only a minute or two, and in the relief that followed she was glad to breathe the air of this little open space, where she could look up at the blue sky and enjoy the sense of repose. The places of business round about were still and vacant, closed till Monday morning. Only a dull sound of traffic came from the great thoroughfare, near at hand as it was. And the wonderful sky made her think of little Billy who was enjoying himself up the river. She had felt a slight uneasiness about him, now and then, for Jem Pollock was a reckless fellow at all times, and in weather like this he was sure to have been drinking freely; but Solomon would look after the boy.

They would get back about eight o'clock, most likely. Billy would be hungry; he must have a bit of something for supper—fried liver, or perhaps some stewed steak. It was time for her to be moving on.

She stood up, but the movement brought on another attack. Her body sank together, her head fell forwards.

Presently the man who was sitting on the next bench began to look at her; he smiled—another victim of the thirsty weather!

And half-an-hour passed before it was discovered that the woman sitting there in the shadow of St. Bride's Church was dead.

That night Jem Pollock went to the house in Southwark where Solomon Burden and his wife and his child had lived. He could hear nothing of Mrs. Burden. The key of the attic lay on the ledge above the door ; no one had been seen, said the neighbours, since father and son went away together early that afternoon.

In the little home there was silence.

IN HONOUR BOUND

AT the top of a dim-windowed house near Gray's Inn Road, in two rooms of his own furnishing, lived a silent, solitary man. He was not old (six-and-thirty at most), and the gentle melancholy of his countenance suggested no quarrel with the world, but rather a placid absorption in congenial studies. His name was Filmer ; he had occupied this lodging for seven or eight years ; only at long intervals did a letter reach him, and the sole person who visited his retreat was Mrs. Mayhew, the charwoman. Mrs. Mayhew came at ten o'clock in the morning, and busied herself about the rooms for an hour or so. Sometimes the lodger remained at home, sitting at his big table heaped with books, and exchanging a friendly word with his attendant ; sometimes he had gone out before her arrival, and in that case he would have been found at the British Museum. Filmer abjured the society of men for that of words ; he was a philological explorer, tracking slowly and patiently the capricious river of human speech. He published nothing, but saw the approaching possibility of a great work, which should do honour to his name.

Proud amid poverty, and shrinking with a nervous sensitiveness from the commerce of mankind, he often passed weeks at a time without addressing a familiar word to any mortal save Mrs. Mayhew. He had made friends with his charwoman, though not till the experience of years taught him to regard her with entire confidence and no little respect. To her he even spoke of his studies, half soliloquising, indeed, but feeling it not impossible that she might gather some general conception of what he meant. In turn, Mrs. Mayhew confided to him some details of her own history, which threw light upon the fact that she neither looked nor spoke like an ordinary charwoman. She was a meagre but trim-bodied little person of about the same age as her employer, clean, neat, and brisk, her face sharply outlined, with large good-humoured eyes, and a round mouth. A widow, she said, for ten years and more ; childless ; pretty much alone in the world, though she had relatives not badly off. Shamefaced hints made known to Filmer that she blamed only herself for her poor condition, and one day she confessed to him that her weakness had been drink. When first he engaged her services she was struggling painfully out of the mire, battling with old temptations, facing toil and hunger. ' And now, sir,' she said, with her modest, childish laugh, ' I feel almost a respectable woman ; I do, indeed ! ' Whereat Filmer smiled pensively and nodded.

No life could be less eventful than his. He enjoyed

an income of seventy pounds, and looked not for increase. Of his costume he took no thought, his diet was the simplest conceivable. He wanted no holidays. Leisure to work in his own way, blessed independence—this sufficed him.

On a morning of December (the year was 1869) Mrs. Mayhew came to the house as usual, went upstairs and tapped at Filmer's door. On entering she was surprised to see a fireless grate, and on the table no trace of breakfast. Filmer stood by the window ; she bade him good-morning, and looked about the room in surprise.

'I'm going out,' said the student, in a voice unlike his own. 'I didn't trouble to light the fire.'

She observed his face.

'But won't you have breakfast, sir? I'll get some in a minute.'

'No, thank you. I shall get some—some—where——'

He went into the bedroom, was absent a few minutes, and returned with his overcoat.

'I wanted to speak to you, sir,' said Mrs. Mayhew, diffidently. 'But if you are in a hurry——'

'No, no. Certainly not. I have plenty of time.'

'I am very sorry to tell you, sir, that, after next week, I sha'n't be able to come. But,' she hastened to add, 'I can recommend some one who'll do the work just as well.'

Filmer listened without appearance of concern ;

he seemed to have a difficulty in fixing his thoughts on the matter.

'I am going to take a little shop,' pursued the other, 'a little general shop. It's part of the house where I've been living. The woman that's had it hasn't done well: but it was her own fault; she didn't attend to business, and she—but there's no need to trouble you with such things, sir. Some one advised me to see what I could do in that way, and I thought it over. The landlord will let me have the shop, and a room behind it, and another room upstairs, for twenty-eight pounds a year, if I pay a quarter in advance. That's seven pounds, you see, sir; and I ought to have about twenty pounds altogether to start with. I've got a little more than ten, and I know some one who'll lend me another ten, I think.' She spoke quickly, a glow of excitement in her cheeks. 'And I feel sure I can make the business pay. I've seen a good deal of it, from living in the house. There's lots of people round about who would deal with me, and of course I could begin with a small stock, and——'

Her breath failed; she broke off with a pant and a laugh. Filmer, after standing for a moment as if in uncertainty, said that he was very glad to hear all this, and that he would talk with her about it on the morrow. At present he must go out—on business—special and disagreeable business. But he would talk to-morrow. And so, without further remark, he went his way.

The next morning Mrs. Mayhew saw that her employer was still in a most unusual frame of mind. He had a fire, but was sitting by it in gloomy idleness. To her 'Good-morning' he merely nodded, and only when she had finished putting the bedroom to rights did he show a disposition to speak.

'Well, Mrs. Mayhew,' he said at length, 'I also have news to tell. I have lost all my money, and have nothing to live upon.'

Her large eyes gazed at him with astonishment and compassion.

'Oh, Mr. Filmer! What a dreadful thing!'

'Bad; there's no disguising it.' He struggled to speak without dolefulness; his limbs moved nervously, and he stared away from his companion. 'No hope, now, of writing my book. All over with me. I must earn my living—I don't know how. It's twelve years since I ever thought of such a thing; I felt safe for my whole life. All gone at a blow; you can read about it in the newspaper.'

'But—but you can't surely have lost everything, sir?'

'I have a few pounds. About thirty pounds, I think. What's the use of that? I don't want very much, but'—he tried to jest—'I can't live on ten shillings a year.'

'But with all your learning, Mr. Filmer——'

'Yes, I must find something. Go and teach in a

school, or something of the kind. But I'm afraid you can't understand what it means to me.'

He became silent. Mrs. Mayhew looked up and down, moved uneasily, played with the corners of her apron, and at last found resolution to speak.

'Mr. Filmer'—her eyes were very bright and eager—'you couldn't live in one room, I'm afraid, sir?'

'One room?' He glanced vacantly at her. 'Why not? Of course I could. I spend nearly all my time at the Museum. But——'

'I hardly like to say it, sir, but there's something—if you thought—I told you I was going to have a room behind the shop, and one upstairs. I meant to let the one upstairs.'

He interrupted, rather coldly.

'Oh, I would take it at once if I had the least prospect of being able to live. But what is the use of settling down anywhere with thirty pounds? To write my book I need at least two years, and a quiet mind——'

'But I was going to say something else, sir, if you'll excuse the liberty. I told you I shall have to borrow some money, and—and I'm not quite sure after all that I can get it. Will *you* lend it me, sir?' This came out with a jerk, on an impulse of great daring. 'If you would lend me ten pounds, I could afford to let you have the room, and—and to supply you with meals, and in that way pay it back. I'm

quite sure I could.' She grew excited again. 'If I miss getting the shop, somebody else will step in, and make money out of it. I *know* I could very soon make two or three pounds a week out of that business!'

She stopped suddenly, awed by the listener's face. Filmer, for the first time since her knowledge of him, looked coldly distant, even offended.

'I beg your pardon, sir. I oughtn't to have said such a thing.'

He stood up.

'It was a kind thought, Mrs. Mayhew; but—I really don't know——' His face was changing. 'I should very much like to let you have the money. A few days ago I would gladly have done so. But——'

His tongue faltered. He looked at the woman, and saw how her countenance had fallen.

'Ten pounds,' he said abruptly, 'couldn't last—for my support—more than a few weeks.'

'Not by itself, sir,' replied the other, eagerly; 'but money grows so when it's put into trade. I do believe it would bring in a pound a week. Or, at all events, I'm quite sure it would bring enough——'

She glanced, involuntarily, at the breakfast table, which seldom showed anything but bread and butter.

'In that case,' said Filmer, laughing. 'I should be a partner in the business.'

Mrs. Mayhew smiled, and made no answer.

That day they could not arrive at a decision ; but after nightfall Filmer walked along the street in which he knew Mrs. Mayhew lived, and looked for the shop. That which answered to her description was a miserable little hole, where seemingly business was still being carried on ; the glimmer of one gas-jet rather suggested than revealed objects in the window—a loaf, some candles, a bundle of firewood, and so on. He hurried past, and got into another street as quickly as possible.

Later, he was prowling in the same locality, and again he went past the shop. This time he observed it more deliberately. After all, the place itself was not so squalid as it had seemed ; by daylight it might look tolerable. And the street could not be called a slum. Other considerations apart he could contemplate having his abode here ; for he knew nobody, and never had to fear a visit. Besides the little chandler's there were only two shops ; no public-house, and hardly any traffic of a noisy kind.

In his great need, his horror of going forth among strangers (for of course his lodgings were now too expensive to be kept a day longer than he could help), Filmer compromised with himself. By lending Mrs. Mayhew ten pounds he might justly accept from her a lodging and the plainest sustenance for, say, ten weeks, and in that time he would of necessity have taken some steps towards earning a livelihood. Some of his books and furniture he must sell, thus

adding to the petty reserve which stood between him and starvation. If it would really be helping the good woman, as well as benefiting himself, common sense bade him disregard the fastidiousness which at first had been shocked by such a proposal. 'Beggars cannot be choosers,' said the old adage; he must swallow his pride.

Waking at the dead hour of night, and facing once more the whole terrible significance of what had befallen him, not easily grasped in daytime, he resolved to meet the charwoman next morning in a humble and grateful spirit. His immediate trouble thus overcome, he could again sleep.

And so it came about that, in some few days, Filmer found himself a tenant of the front room above the chandler's shop. As he still had the familiar furniture about him, he suffered less uneasiness—his removal once over—than might have been anticipated. True, he moaned the loss of beloved volumes; but, on the other hand, his purse had gained by it. As soon as possible he repaired to the Museum, and there, in the seat he had occupied for years, and with books open before him, he tried to think calmly.

Mrs. Mayhew, meanwhile, had entered exultantly into possession of her business premises; the little shop was stocked much better than for a long time, and customers followed each other throughout the day. In his utter ignorance of such transactions, the philologist accepted what she had at first told him

as a sufficient explanation of the worthy woman's establishment in shop-keeping. To a practical eye, it would have seemed not a little mysterious that some twenty pounds had sufficed for all the preparations ; but Filmer merely glanced with satisfaction at the shop front as he came and went, and listened trustfully when Mrs. Mayhew informed him that the first week's profits enabled her to purchase some new fittings, as well as provide for all current expenditure.

Under these circumstances, it was not wonderful that the student experienced a diminution of personal anxiety. Saying to himself every day that he must take some step, he yet took none save that literal step which brought him daily to the Museum. A fortnight, and he had actually resumed work ; three weeks, and he was busy with the initial chapter of his great book ; a month, and he scarcely troubled himself to remember that his income had vanished. For Mrs. Mayhew did not let a day pass without assuring him that his ten pounds—his share in the partnership—produced more than enough to represent the cost of his board and lodging. He lived better than in the old days, had an excellent supper on coming home from the Museum, a warm breakfast before setting out. And these things caused him no astonishment. The literary recluse sees no limit to the potentialities of 'trade.'

At length he remembered that ten weeks had

gone by, and on a Sunday morning he summoned his partner to a conference. The quondam charwoman looked a very presentable person as she entered in her Sunday gown. Though she still did a good deal of rough work, her hands were becoming softer and more shapely. In shop and house she had the assistance of a young girl, the daughter of the people who occupied the upper rooms, and it was this girl—Amanda Wilkes by name, and known to her friends as 'Manda—who generally waited upon Filmer.

'Mrs. Mayhew,' he began gravely, 'I begin to feel that I have no right to continue living in this way. You have long since paid me back the small sum I lent you——'

'Oh, but I have explained to you, sir,' broke in the other, who bated nothing of her accustomed respect, 'that money is always making more—indeed it is. It makes enough for you to live upon, as long—oh, as long as you like.'

The philologist drew a silent breath, and stared at the floor.

'Now *don't* trouble yourself, sir!' begged Mrs. Mayhew, 'please don't! If you can be content to live here—until——'

'I am more than content so far as personal comfort goes. But—well, let me explain to you. At last, I have really made a beginning with my book. If my misfortune hadn't happened I might have

put it off for years ; so, in one way, perhaps that loss was a good thing. I am working very hard——’

‘ Oh, I *know* you are, Mr. Filmer. I can’t think how you do with so little sleep, sir. I’m sure I wonder your health doesn’t break down.’

‘ No, no ; I do well enough : I’m used to it. But the point is that I may be a year or two on this book—a year or two, and how can I possibly go on presuming upon your great kindness to me——’

Mrs. Mayhew laughed, and for the hundredth time put before him the commercial view of the matter. Once again he suffered himself to be reassured, though with much nervous twitching of head and limbs ; and after this he seldom recurred to his scruple.

Two years went by, and in the early months of the third Filmer’s treatise lay finished. As he sat one evening by his fireside, smoking a delicious pipe, he flattered himself that he had made a solid contribution to the science of Comparative Philology. He was thirty-eight years old ; young enough still to enjoy any honour or reward the learned world might choose to offer him. What he now had to do was to discover a publisher who would think this book worth the expense of printing. Long ago he had made up his mind that, if profit there were, Mrs. Mayhew must share in it. Though his ten pounds had kept him alive all this time, yet clearly it would not have done so but for Mrs. Mayhew’s skill and

labour; he felt himself vastly indebted to her, and earnestly hoped that he might be able to show his gratitude in some substantial form.

Fortune favoured him. His manuscript came into the hands of a generous scholar, a man after his own heart, who not only recommended it to the publisher in terms of enthusiasm, but expressed an earnest desire to make the acquaintance of the author. Filmer, no longer ashamed before his fellows, went forth from the hermitage above the chandler's shop, and was seen of men. He still had money enough to provide himself with decent clothing, and on a certain day his appearance so astonished Mrs. Mayhew that she exclaimed tremulously :

‘Are you going, Mr. Filmer? Are you going to leave us?’

‘I can't say,’ was his nervous answer. ‘I don't know yet whether I shall make any money by my book.’

He told her how things were tending.

‘Oh,’ she answered, ‘then I'm sure you will soon get back to your proper position. After all, sir, you know, you oughtn't to be living in this poor way. You are a learned gentleman.’

Her voice was agitated, and her thoughts seemed to wander. The philologist examined her for a moment, but she turned away with a hurried excuse that she was wanted down stairs.

That day Filmer brooded.

In another month it was known that his book would be published; whether he profited thereby must depend upon its success. In the meantime, one or two fragments of the work were to appear in the *Journal of Comparative Philology*; moreover, the author himself was to read a paper before an erudite society. Overcoming false delicacy, he had made known his position (without detail) to the philological friend who took so much interest in him, and before long a practical suggestion was made, which, if it could be carried out, would assure him at all events a modest livelihood.

Amid all this promise of prosperity, Filmer was beset by graver trouble than he had known since that disastrous day, now two years and a half ago. He could no longer doubt that the prospect of his departure affected Mrs. Mayhew very painfully. She kept out of his way, and when meeting was inevitable spoke the fewest possible words. More, he had once, on entering his room unexpectedly, surprised her there in a tearful condition; yes, unmistakably weeping; and she hurried out of his sight.

What could it mean? Her business thrived; all appeared well with her. Could the mere thought of losing his companionship cause her such acute distress? If so——

He took long walks, musing anxiously over the

situation. At home he shrank into himself, moved without sound, tried, if such a thing were possible, to dwell in the house and yet not be there. He stayed out late at night, fearing to meet Mrs. Mayhew as he entered. Ludicrous as it sounded to a man who had long since forgotten the softer dreams of youth, Mrs. Mayhew might perchance have conceived an attachment for him. They had now known each other for many years, and long ago the simple-minded woman used to talk with him in a way that betrayed kindly feeling. She, it must be remembered, did not strictly belong to the class in which he found her; she was the daughter of a man of business, had gone to school, had been married to a solicitor's clerk. Probably her life contained a darker incident than anything she had disclosed; perhaps she had left her husband, or been repudiated by him. But a strong character ultimately saved her; she was now beyond reproach. And if he were about to inflict a great sorrow upon her, his own suffering would be scarcely less severe.

As he crept softly into the house one night, he came face to face with a tall man whom he remembered to have seen here on several former occasions; decently dressed, like a clerk or shopman, forty years old or so, and not ill-looking. Filmer, with a glance at him, gave good-evening, and, to his surprise, the stranger made no reply; nay, it seemed to him that he was regarded with a distinctly un-

amiable stare. This troubled him for the moment, sensitive as he was, but he concluded that the ill-conditioned fellow was a friend of the family upstairs, and soon forgot the occurrence.

A day or two later, as the girl 'Manda served his breakfast, she looked at him oddly, and seemed desirous of saying something. This young person was now about seventeen, and rather given to friskiness, though Mrs. Mayhew called her an excellent girl, and treated her like a sister.

'If you please, Mr. Filmer,' she began, in an unusually diffident tone.

'Yes?'

'Is it true that you're going to leave us, sir?'

She smirked a little, and altogether behaved strangely.

'Who told you I was going to?' asked Filmer.

'Oh!—Mrs. Mayhew said as it was likely, sir.'

Again she dropped her eyes, and fidgeted. The philologist, much disturbed, spoke on an impulse.

'Yes,' he said, 'I am going—very soon. I may have to leave any day.'

'Oh!' was the reply, and to his ears it sounded like an expression of relief. But why 'Manda should be glad of his departure he could not imagine.

However, his resolve was taken. He had no right to remain here. Prospects or no prospects, he would engage a room in quite a different part of the

town, and make his few pounds last as long as possible.

And on this resolve he had the strength to act. Dreadful to him in anticipation, the parting with Mrs. Mayhew came about in the simplest and easiest way. When he had made known his purpose—with nervous solemnity which tried to mask as genial friendliness—the listener kept a brief silence. Then she asked, in a low voice, whether he was quite sure that he had means enough to live upon. Oh yes ; he felt no uneasiness, things were shaping themselves satisfactorily.

‘Of course, Mrs. Mayhew, we are not saying good-bye.’ He laughed, as if in mockery of the idea. ‘We shall see each other—from time to time—often ! Such old friends——’

Her dubious look and incomplete phrase of assent—her eyes cast down—troubled him profoundly. But the dreaded interview was over. In a few days he removed his furniture. Happily the leave-taking was not in private ; ‘Manda and her mother both shared in it ; yet poor Mrs. Mayhew’s eyes had a sorrowful dimness, and her attempted gaiety weighed upon his spirits.

He lived now in the South-west of London, and refrained even from visits to the British Museum. . . . The breaking-up of his life-long habits, the idleness into which he had fallen, encouraged a morbid activity of conscience ; under gray autumnal skies he walked

about the roads and the parks, by the riverside, and sometimes beyond the limits of town, but there was no escape from a remorseful memory. When two or three weeks had passed, his unrest began to be complicated with fears of destitution. But, of a sudden, the half promise that had been made to him was fulfilled: the erudite society offered him a post which, in his modest computation, represented all that a man could desire of worldly prosperity. He could now establish himself beneath some reputable roof, repurchase his books, look forward to a life of congenial duty and intellectual devotion. But——

His wandering steps brought him to the Chelsea Embankment, where he leaned upon the parapet, and gazed at the sullen river.

To whom—to whom did he owe all this? Who was it that had saved him at that black time when he thought of death as his only friend? Who had toiled for him, cared for him, whilst he wrote his book? Now at length he was able to evince gratitude otherwise than in mere words, and like a dastard he slunk away. He had deserted the woman who loved him.

And why? She was not his equal; yet certainly not so far his inferior that, even in the sight of the world, he need be ashamed of her. The merest cowardice, the plainest selfishness, withheld him from

returning to Mrs. Mayhew and making her that offer which he was in honour bound to make.

Yes, in honour bound. Thus far had his delicate sensibilities, his philosophical magnanimity, impelled the lonely scholar. Love of woman he knew not, but a generous warmth of heart enabled him to contemplate the wooing and wedding of his benefactress without repugnance. In a sense it would be loss of liberty ; but might he not find compensation in domestic comfort, in the tender care that would be lavished upon him? But the higher view—a duty discharged, a heart solaced——

The next day was Sunday. In the morning there fell heavy rain : after noon the clouds swept eastward, and rays of sunlight glistened on the wet streets. Filmer had sat totally unoccupied. He made a pretence of eating the dinner that was brought to him, and then, having attired himself as though he had not a minute to lose, left home. Travelling by omnibus, he reached the neighbourhood hitherto so carefully shunned ; he walked rapidly to the familiar street, and, with heart throbbing painfully, he stood before the little chandler's shop, which of course was closed.

A knock at the house-door. It was answered by 'Manda, who stared and smiled, and seemed neither glad nor sorry to see him, but somehow in perturbation.

'Is Mrs. Mayhew in?' whispered, rather than spoke, the philologist.

'No, sir. She went out not long ago—with Mr. Marshall. And she won't be back just yet—p'r'aps not till supper.'

'With—with Mr. Marshall?'

'Yes, sir,' Manda grinned. 'They're going to be married next Saturday, sir.'

Filmer straightened himself and stood like a soldier at attention.

'To be married?—Mrs. Mayhew?'

The girl laughed, nodded, seemed greatly amused.

'I should like to come in, and—and speak to you for a moment.'

'Oh yes, sir,' she smirked. 'There's nobody in. Would you mind coming into the shop?'

He followed. The well-remembered odour of Mrs. Mayhew's merchandise enveloped him about, and helped still further to confuse his thoughts in a medley of past and present. Over the shop window hung a dirty yellow blind, through which the sunshine struggled dimly. Filmer hesitated for a moment.

'Who is Mr. Marshall, 'Manda?' he was able to ask at length.

'Don't you know, sir?' She stood before him in a perky attitude, her fingers interlaced. 'You've seen him. A tall man—dark-looking——'

‘Ah! Yes, I remember. I have seen him. How long has Mrs. Mayhew known him?’

‘Oh, a long, long time. He lent her a lot of money when she started the shop. They’d have been married before, only Mr. Marshall’s wife was alive—in a ‘sylum.’

‘In an asylum?’

‘Brought on by drink, they say. There’s all sorts of tales about her.’

The philologist eased himself by moving a few paces. He looked from the pile of firewood bundles before the counter to a row of canisters on the topmost shelf.

‘I’m glad to hear this,’ at length fell from his lips. ‘Just say I called; and that I—I’ll call again some day.’

‘Manda’s odd expression arrested his eyes. He turned away, however, and stepped out into the passage, where little if any daylight penetrated. Behind him, ‘Manda spoke.

‘I don’t think I’d come again, sir.’

‘Why not?’

He tried to see her face, but she kept in shadow.

‘Mr. Marshall mightn’t like it, sir. Nor Mrs. Mayhew—Mrs. Marshall as *will* be.’

‘Not like it?’

‘You won’t say anything, if I tell you?’ said the girl, in a low and hurried yet laughing tone. ‘It made a little trouble—because you was here. Mr.

Marshall thought—' a giggle filled the lacuna. ' And Mrs. Mayhew didn't like to say anything to you. She's that kind to everybody——'

Filmer stretched his hand to the door, fumbled at the latch, and at length got out. It took some hours before his shamefaced misery yielded to the blissful sense of relief and of freedom.

THE PRIZE LODGER

THE ordinary West-End Londoner—who is a citizen of no city at all, but dwells amid a mere conglomerate of houses at a certain distance from Charing Cross—has known a fleeting surprise when, by rare chance, his eye fell upon the name of some such newspaper as the *Battersea Times*, the *Camberwell Mercury*, or the *Islington Gazette*. To him, these and the like districts are nothing more than compass points of the huge metropolis. He may be in practice acquainted with them; if historically inclined, he may think of them as old-time villages swallowed up by insatiable London; but he has never grasped the fact that in Battersea, Camberwell, Islington, there are people living who name these places as their home; who are born, subsist, and die there as though in a distinct town, and practically without consciousness of its obliteration in the map of a world capital.

The stable element of this population consists of more or less old-fashioned people. Round about them is the ceaseless coming and going of nomads

who keep abreast with the time, who take their lodgings by the week, their houses by the month ; who camp indifferently in regions old and new, learning their geography in train and tram-car. Abiding parishioners are wont to be either very poor or established in a moderate prosperity ; they lack enterprise, either for good or ill : if comfortably off, they owe it, as a rule, to some predecessor's exertion. And for the most part, though little enough endowed with the civic spirit, they abundantly pride themselves on their local permanence.

Representative of this class was Mr. Archibald Jordan, a native of Islington, and, at the age of five-and-forty, still faithful to the streets which he had trodden as a child. His father started a small grocery business in Upper Street ; Archibald succeeded to the shop, advanced soberly, and at length admitted a partner, by whose capital and energy the business was much increased. After his thirtieth year Mr. Jordan ceased to stand behind the counter. Of no very active disposition, and but moderately set on gain, he found it pleasant to spend a few hours daily over the books and the correspondence, and for the rest of his time to enjoy a gossiping leisure, straying among the acquaintances of a lifetime, or making new in the decorous bar-parlours, billiard-rooms, and other such retreats which allured his bachelor liberty. His dress and bearing were unpretentious, but impressively respectable ; he

never allowed his garments (made by an Islington tailor, an old schoolfellow) to exhibit the least sign of wear, but fashion affected their style as little as possible. Of middle height, and tending to portliness, he walked at an unvarying pace, as a man who had never known undignified hurry; in his familiar thoroughfares he glanced about him with a good-humoured air of proprietorship, or with a look of thoughtful criticism for any changes that might be going forward. No one had ever spoken flatteringly of his visage; he knew himself a very homely-featured man, and accepted the fact, as something that had neither favoured nor hindered him in life. But it was his conviction that no man's eye had a greater power of solemn and overwhelming rebuke, and this gift he took a pleasure in exercising, however trivial the occasion.

For five-and-twenty years he had lived in lodgings; always within the narrow range of Islington respectability, yet never for more than a twelvemonth under the same roof. This peculiar feature of Mr Jordan's life had made him a subject of continual interest to local landladies, among whom were several lifelong residents, on friendly terms of old time with the Jordan family. To them it seemed an astonishing thing that a man in such circumstances had not yet married; granting this eccentricity, they could not imagine what made him change his abode so often. Not a landlady in Islington but would welcome Mr. Jordan in her rooms, and, having got

him, do her utmost to prolong the connection. He had been known to quit a house on the paltriest excuse, removing to another in which he could not expect equally good treatment. There was no accounting for it: it must be taken as an ultimate mystery of life, and made the most of as a perennial topic of neighbourly conversation.

As to the desirability of having Mr. Jordan for a lodger there could be no difference of opinion among rational womankind. Mrs. Wiggins, indeed, had taken his sudden departure from her house so ill that she always spoke of him abusively; but who heeded Mrs. Wiggins? Even in the sadness of hope deferred, those ladies who had entertained him once, and speculated on his possible return, declared Mr. Jordan a 'thorough gentleman.' Lodgers, as a class, do not recommend themselves in Islington; Mr. Jordan shone against the dusky background with almost dazzling splendour. To speak of lodgers as of cattle, he was a prize creature. A certain degree of comfort he firmly exacted; he might be a trifle fastidious about cooking; he stood upon his dignity; but no one could say that he grudged reward for service rendered. It was his practice to pay more than the landlady asked. 'Twenty-five shillings a week, you say? I shall give you twenty-eight. *But—*' and with raised forefinger he went through the catalogue of his demands. Everything must be done precisely as he directed; even in the laying of his table he insisted

upon certain minute peculiarities, and to forget one of them was to earn that gaze of awful reprimand which Mr. Jordan found (or thought) more efficacious than any spoken word. Against this precision might be set his strange indulgence in the matter of bills; he merely regarded the total, was never known to dispute an item. Only twice in his long experience had he quitted a lodging because of exorbitant charges, and on these occasions he sternly refused to discuss the matter. 'Mrs. Hawker, I am paying your account with the addition of one week's rent. Your rooms will be vacant at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning.' And until the hour of departure no entreaty, no prostration, could induce him to utter a syllable.

It was on the 1st of June, 1889, his forty-fifth birthday, that Mr. Jordan removed from quarters he had occupied for ten months, and became a lodger in the house of Mrs. Elderfield.

Mrs. Elderfield, a widow, aged three-and-thirty, with one little girl, was but a casual resident in Islington; she knew nothing of Mr. Jordan, and made no inquiries about him. Strongly impressed, as every woman must needs be, by his air and tone of mild authority, she congratulated herself on the arrival of such an inmate; but no subservience appeared in her demeanour; she behaved with studious civility, nothing more. Her words were few and well chosen. Always neatly dressed, yet always busy, she moved about the house with quick, silent step, and cleanliness

marked her path. The meals were well cooked, well served. Mr. Jordan being her only lodger, she could devote to him an undivided attention. At the end of his first week the critical gentleman felt greater satisfaction than he had ever known.

The bill lay upon his table at breakfast-time. He perused the items, and, much against his habit, reflected upon them. Having breakfasted, he rang the bell.

‘Mrs. Elderfield——’

He paused, and looked gravely at the widow. She had a plain, honest, healthy face, with resolute lips, and an eye that brightened when she spoke ; her well-knit figure, motionless in its respectful attitude, declared a thoroughly sound condition of the nerves.

‘Mrs. Elderfield, your bill is so very moderate that I think you must have forgotten something.’

‘Have you looked it over, sir?’

‘I never trouble about the details. Please examine it.’

‘There is no need, sir. I never make a mistake.’

‘I said, Mrs. Elderfield, please *examine* it.’

She seemed to hesitate, but obeyed.

‘The bill is quite correct, sir.’

‘Thank you.’

He paid it at once and said no more.

The weeks went on. To Mr. Jordan’s surprise,

his landlady's zeal and efficiency showed no diminution, a thing unprecedented in his long and varied experience. After the first day or two he had found nothing to correct; every smallest instruction was faithfully carried out. Moreover, he knew for the first time in his life the comfort of absolutely clean rooms. The best of his landladies hitherto had not risen above that conception of cleanliness which is relative to London soot and fog. His palate, too, was receiving an education. Probably he had never eaten of a joint rightly cooked, or tasted a potato boiled as it should be; more often than not, the food set before him had undergone a process which left it masticable indeed, but void of savour and nourishment. Many little attentions of which he had never dreamed kept him in a wondering cheerfulness. And at length he said to himself: 'Here I shall stay.'

Not that his constant removals had been solely due to discomfort and a hope of better things. The secret—perhaps not entirely revealed even to himself—lay in Mr. Jordan's sense of his own importance, and his uneasiness whenever he felt that, in the eyes of a landlady, he was becoming a mere everyday person—an ordinary lodger. No sooner did he detect a sign of this than he made up his mind to move. It gave him the keenest pleasure of which he was capable when, on abruptly announcing his immediate departure, he perceived the landlady's profound mortification. To

make the blow heavier he had even resorted to artifice, seeming to express a most lively contentment during the very days when he had decided to leave and was asking himself where he should next abide. One of his delights was to return to a house which he had quitted years ago, to behold the excitement and bustle occasioned by his appearance, and play the good-natured autocrat over grovelling dependents. In every case, save the two already mentioned, he had parted with his landlady on terms of friendliness, never vouchsafing a reason for his going away, genially eluding every attempt to obtain an explanation, and at the last abounding in graceful recognition of all that had been done for him. Mr. Jordan shrank from dispute, hated every sort of contention; this characteristic gave a certain refinement to his otherwise commonplace existence. Vulgar vanity would have displayed itself in precisely the acts and words from which his self-esteem nervously shrank. And of late he had been thinking over the list of his landladies, with a half-formed desire to settle down, to make himself a permanent home. Doubtless as a result of this state of mind, he betook himself to a strange house, where, as from neutral ground, he might reflect upon the lodgings he knew, and judge between their merits. He could not foresee what awaited him under Mrs. Elderfield's roof; the event impressed him as providential; he felt, with singular emotion, that choice was taken out of his hands.

Lodgings could not be more than perfect, and such he had found.

It was not his habit to chat with landladies. At times he held forth to them on some topic of interest, suavely, instructively ; if he gave in to their ordinary talk, it was with a half-absent smile of condescension. Mrs. Elderfield seeming as little disposed to gossip as himself, a month elapsed before he knew anything of her history ; but one evening the reserve on both sides was broken. His landlady modestly inquired whether she was giving satisfaction, and Mr. Jordan replied with altogether unwonted fervour. In the dialogue that ensued, they exchanged personal confidences. The widow had lost her husband four years ago ; she came from the Midlands, but had long dwelt in London. Then fell from her lips a casual remark which made the hearer uneasy.

‘ I don’t think I shall always stay here. The neighbourhood is too crowded. I should like to have a house somewhere further out.’

Mr. Jordan did not comment on this, but it kept a place in his daily thoughts, and became at length so much of an anxiety that he invited a renewal of the subject.

‘ You have no intention of moving just yet, Mrs. Elderfield ? ’

‘ I was going to tell you, sir,’ replied the landlady, with her respectful calm, ‘ that I have decided to make a change next spring. Some friends of mine have

gone to live at Wood Green, and I shall look for a house in the same neighbourhood.'

Mr. Jordan was, in private, gravely disturbed. He who had flitted from house to house for many years, distressing the souls of landladies, now lamented the prospect of a forced removal. It was open to him to accompany Mrs. Elderfield, but he shrank from the thought of living in so remote a district. Wood Green ! The very name appalled him, for he had never been able to endure the country. He betook himself one dreary autumn afternoon to that northern suburb, and what he saw did not at all reassure him. On his way back he began once more to review the list of old lodgings.

But from that day his conversations with Mrs. Elderfield grew more frequent, more intimate. In the evening he occasionally made an excuse for knocking at her parlour door, and lingered for a talk which ended only at supper time. He spoke of his own affairs, and grew more ready to do so as his hearer manifested a genuine interest, without impertinent curiosity. Little by little he imparted to Mrs. Elderfield a complete knowledge of his commercial history, of his pecuniary standing—matters of which he had never before spoken to a mere acquaintance. A change was coming over him ; the foundations of habit crumbled beneath his feet ; he lost his look of complacency, his self-confident and superior tone. Bar-parlours and billiard-rooms saw him but rarely and

fittingly. He seemed to have lost his pleasure in the streets of Islington, and spent all his spare time by the fireside, perpetually musing.

On a day in March one of his old landladies, Mrs. Higdon, sped to the house of another, Mrs. Evans, panting under a burden of strange news. Could it be believed! Mr. Jordan was going to marry—to marry that woman in whose house he was living! Mrs. Higdon had it on the very best authority—that of Mr. Jordan's partner, who spoke of the affair without reserve. A new house had already been taken—at Wood Green. Well! After all these years, after so many excellent opportunities, to marry a mere stranger and forsake Islington! In a moment Mr. Jordan's character was gone; had he figured in the police-court under some disgraceful charge, these landladies could hardly have felt more shocked and professed themselves more disgusted. The intelligences spread. Women went out of their way to have a sight of Mrs. Elderfield's house; they hung about for a glimpse of that sinister person herself. She had robbed them, every one, of a possible share in Islington's prize lodger. Had it been one of themselves they could have borne the chagrin; but a woman whom not one of them knew, an alien! What base arts had she practised? Ah, it was better not to inquire too closely into the secrets of that lodging-house!

Though every effort was made to learn the time

and place of the ceremony, Mr. Jordan's landladies had the mortification to hear of his wedding only when it was over. Of course, this showed that he felt the disgracefulness of his behaviour ; he was not utterly lost to shame. It could only be hoped that he would not know the bitterness of repentance.

Not till he found himself actually living in the house at Wood Green did Mr. Jordan realise how little his own will had had to do with the recent course of events. Certainly, he had made love to the widow, and had asked her to marry him ; but from that point onward he seemed to have put himself entirely in Mrs. Elderfield's hands, granting every request, meeting half-way every suggestion she offered, becoming, in short, quite a different kind of man from his former self. He had not been sensible of a moment's reluctance ; he enjoyed the novel sense of yielding himself to affectionate guidance. His wits had gone wool-gathering ; they returned to him only after the short honeymoon at Brighton, when he stood upon his own hearth-rug, and looked round at the new furniture and ornaments which symbolised a new beginning of life.

The admirable landlady had shown herself energetic, clear-headed, and full of resource ; it was she who chose the house, and transacted all the business in connection with it ; Mr. Jordan had merely run about in her company from place to place, smiling

approval and signing cheques. No one could have gone to work more prudently, or obtained what she wanted at smaller outlay ; for all that, Mr. Jordan, having recovered something like his normal frame of mind, viewed the results with consternation. Left to himself, he would have taken a very small house, and furnished it much in the style of Islington lodgings ; as it was, he occupied a ten-roomed 'villa,' with appointments which seemed to him luxurious, aristocratic. True, the expenditure was of no moment to a man in his position, and there was no fear that Mrs. Jordan would involve him in dangerous extravagance ; but he had always lived with such excessive economy that the sudden change to a life correspondent with his income could not but make him uncomfortable.

Mrs. Jordan had, of course, seen to it that her personal appearance harmonised with the new surroundings. She dressed herself and her young daughter with careful appropriateness. There was no display, no purchase of gewgaws—merely garments of good quality, such as became people in easy circumstances. She impressed upon her husband that this was nothing more than a return to the habits of her earlier life. Her first marriage had been a sad mistake ; it had brought her down in the world. Now she felt restored to her natural position.

After a week of restlessness, Mr. Jordan resumed his daily visits to the shop in Upper Street, where he sat as usual among the books and the correspondence, and tried to assure himself that all would henceforth be well with him. No more changing from house to house; a really comfortable home in which to spend the rest of his days; a kind and most capable wife to look after all his needs, to humour all his little habits. He could not have taken a wiser step.

For all that, he had lost something, though he did not yet understand what it was. The first perception of a change not for the better flashed upon him one evening in the second week, when he came home an hour later than his wont. Mrs. Jordan, who always stood waiting for him at the window, had no smile as he entered.

‘Why are you late?’ she asked, in her clear, restrained voice.

‘Oh—something or other kept me.’

This would not do. Mrs. Jordan quietly insisted on a full explanation of the delay, and it seemed to her unsatisfactory.

‘I hope you won’t be irregular in your habits, Archibald,’ said his wife, with gentle admonition. ‘What I always liked in you was your methodical way of living. I shall be very uncomfortable if I never know when to expect you.’

‘Yes, my dear, but—business, you see——’

‘But you have explained that you *could* have been back at the usual time.’

‘Yes—that’s true—but——’

‘Well, well, you won’t let it happen again. Oh really, Archibald!’ she suddenly exclaimed. ‘The idea of you coming into the room with muddy boots! Why, look! There’s a patch of mud on the carpet——’

‘It was my hurry to speak to you,’ murmured Mr. Jordan, in confusion.

‘Please go at once and take your boots off. And you left your slippers in the bedroom this morning. You must always bring them down, and put them in the dining-room cupboard; then they’re ready for you when you come into the house.’

Mr. Jordan had but a moderate appetite for his dinner, and he did not talk so pleasantly as usual. This was but the beginning of troubles such as he had not for a moment foreseen. His wife, having since their engagement taken the upper hand, began to show her determination to keep it, and day by day her rule grew more galling to the ex-bachelor. He himself, in the old days, had plagued his landladies by insisting upon method and routine, by his faddish attention to domestic minutiae; he now learnt what it was to be subjected to the same kind of despotism, exercised with much more exasperating persistence. Whereas Mrs. Elderfield had scrupulously obeyed

every direction given by her lodger, Mrs. Jordan was evidently resolved that her husband should live, move, and have his being in the strictest accordance with her own ideal. Not in any spirit of nagging, or ill-tempered unreasonableness ; it was merely that she had her favourite way of doing every conceivable thing, and felt so sure it was the best of all possible ways that she could not endure any other. The first serious disagreement between them had reference to conduct at the breakfast-table. After a broken night, feeling headachy and worried, Mr. Jordan took up his newspaper, folded it conveniently, and set it against the bread so that he could read while eating. Without a word, his wife gently removed it, and laid it aside on a chair.

‘What are you doing ?’ he asked gruffly.

‘You musn’t read at meals, Archibald. It’s bad manners, and bad for your digestion.’

‘I’ve read the news at breakfast all my life, and I shall do so still,’ exclaimed the husband, starting up and recovering his paper.

‘Then you will have breakfast by yourself. Nelly, we must go into the other room till papa has finished.’

Mr. Jordan ate mechanically, and stared at the newspaper with just as little consciousness. Prompted by the underlying weakness of his character to yield for the sake of peace, wrath made

him dogged, and the more steadily he regarded his position, the more was he appalled by the outlook. Why, this meant downright slavery! He had married a woman so horribly like himself in several points that his only hope lay in overcoming her by sheer violence. A thoroughly good and well-meaning woman, an excellent housekeeper, the kind of wife to do him credit and improve his social position ; but self-willed, pertinacious, and probably thinking herself his superior in every respect. He had nothing to fear but subjection—the one thing he had never anticipated, the one thing he could never endure.

He went off to business without seeing his wife again, and passed a lamentable day. At his ordinary hour of return, instead of setting off homeward, he strayed about the by-streets of Islington and Pentonville. Not till this moment had he felt how dear they were to him, the familiar streets ; their very odours fell sweet upon his nostrils. Never again could he go hither and thither, among the old friends, the old places, to his heart's content. What had possessed him to abandon this precious liberty ! The thought of Wood Green revolted him ; live there as long as he might, he would never be at home. He thought of his wife (now waiting for him) with fear, and then with a reaction of rage. Let her wait ! He—Archibald Jordan—before whom women had bowed and trembled for five-and-twenty years—was *he* to

come and go at a wife's bidding? And at length the thought seemed so utterly preposterous that he sped northward as fast as possible, determined to right himself this very evening.

Mrs. Jordan sat alone. He marched into the room with muddy boots, flung his hat and overcoat into a chair, and poked the fire violently. His wife's eye was fixed on him, and she first spoke—in the quiet voice that he dreaded.

'What do you mean by carrying on like this, Archibald?'

'I shall carry on as I like in my own house—hear that?'

'I do hear it, and I'm very sorry to. It gives me a very bad opinion of you. You will *not* do as you like in your own house. Rage as you please. You will *not* do as you like in your own house.'

There was a contemptuous anger in her eye which the man could not face. He lost all control of himself, uttered coarse oaths, and stood quivering. Then the woman began to lecture him; she talked steadily, acrimoniously, for more than an hour, regardless of his interruptions. Nervously exhausted, he fled at length from the room. A couple of hours later they met again in the nuptial chamber, and again Mrs. Jordan began to talk. Her point, as before, was that he had begun married life about as badly as possible. Why had he married her at all? What fault had she committed to incur such outrageous usage? But,

thank goodness, she had a will of her own, and a proper self-respect ; behave as he might, *she* would still persevere in the path of womanly duty. If he thought to make her life unbearable he would find his mistake ; she simply should not heed him ; perhaps he would return to his senses before long—and in this vein Mrs. Jordan continued until night was at odds with morning, only becoming silent when her partner had sunk into the oblivion of uttermost fatigue.

The next day Mr. Jordan's demeanour showed him, for the moment at all events, defeated. He made no attempt to read at breakfast ; he moved about very quietly. And in the afternoon he came home at the regulation hour.

Mrs. Jordan had friends in the neighbourhood, but she saw little of them. She was not a woman of ordinary tastes. Everything proved that, to her mind, the possession of a nice house, with the prospects of a comfortable life, was an end in itself ; she had no desire to exhibit her well-furnished rooms, or to gad about talking of her advantages. Every moment of her day was taken up in the superintendence of servants, the discharge of an infinitude of housewifely tasks. She had no assistance from her daughter ; the girl went to school, and was encouraged to study with the utmost application. The husband's presence in the house seemed a mere accident—save in the still nocturnal season, when

Mrs. Jordan bestowed upon him her counsel and her admonitions.

After the lapse of a few days Mr. Jordan again offered combat, and threw himself into it with a frenzy.

‘Look here!’ he shouted at length, ‘either you or I are going to leave this house. I can’t live with you—understand? I hate the sight of you!’

‘Go on!’ retorted the other, with mild bitterness. ‘Abuse me as much as you like, I can bear it. I shall continue to do my duty, and unless you have recourse to personal violence, here I remain. If you go too far, of course the law must defend me!’

This was precisely what Mr. Jordan knew and dreaded; the law was on his wife’s side, and by applying at a police-court for protection she could overwhelm him with shame and ridicule, which would make life intolerable. Impossible to argue with this woman. Say what he might, the fault always seemed his. His wife was simply doing her duty—in a spirit of admirable thoroughness; he, in the eyes of a third person, would appear an unreasonable and violent curmudgeon. Had it not all sprung out of his obstinacy with regard to reading at breakfast? How explain to anyone what he suffered in his nerves, in his pride, in the outraged habitudes of a lifetime?

That evening he did not return to Wood Green. Afraid of questions if he showed himself in the old

resorts, he spent some hours in a billiard-room near King's Cross, and towards midnight took a bedroom under the same roof. On going to business next day, he awaited with tremors either a telegram or a visit from his wife ; but the whole day passed, and he heard nothing. After dark he walked once more about the beloved streets, pausing now and then to look up at the windows of this or that well-remembered house. Ah, if he durst but enter and engage a lodging ! Impossible—for ever impossible !

He slept in the same place as on the night before. And again a day passed without any sort of inquiry from Wood Green. When evening came he went home.

Mrs. Jordan behaved as though he had returned from business in the usual way. 'Is it raining?' she asked, with a half-smile. And her husband replied, in as matter-of-fact a tone as he could command, 'No, it isn't.' There was no mention between them of his absence. That night Mrs. Jordan talked for an hour or two of his bad habit of stepping on the paint when he went up and down stairs, then fell calmly asleep.

But Mr. Jordan did not sleep for a long time. What ! was he, after all, to be allowed his liberty *out* of doors, provided he relinquished it within ? Was it really the case that his wife, satisfied with her house and furniture and income, did not care a jot whether he stayed away or came home ? There,

indeed, gleamed a hope. When Mr. Jordan slept, he dreamed that he was back again in lodgings at Islington, tasting an extraordinary bliss. Day dissipated the vision, but still Mrs. Jordan spoke not a word of his absence, and with trembling still he hoped.

OUR MR. JUPP

YOU knew the man at once by his likeness to a thousand others. His clothes were always in good condition ; the gloss of his linen declared a daily renewal ; he was scrupulously shaven, and blew his nose with a silk handkerchief. Yet the impression he made was sordid. The very flower in his buttonhole took a taint of vulgarity, and became suggestive of cheap promenade concerts, or of the public dancing-saloon. He had a fresh colour, proof of time spent chiefly out of doors ; his features were blunt, trivial, not to be remembered ; in his yellowish eyes lurked a speculative cunning, a cold self-conceit which tuned with the frequent simper upon his loose lips.

At his present age of nine-and-twenty Mr. Jupp represented a South London firm of wholesale haberdashers, a house struggling hard against early difficulties—he was their town traveller, and they thought a good deal of him. He had the use of a pony-trap and attendant boy ; to observe him as he drove about the highways and byways was to enter into the spirit of commercial democracy. Proud of his personal appearance and of his turn-out, proud of

his skill in cutting the corners, he rattled from shop to shop with zealous absorption in the business of the day, with an eye for nothing but what concerned his immediate interests. Out of business hours Jupp became a gentleman of untroubled leisure, visited the theatre or music-hall several times in the week, looked in at the Criterion bar about eleven, was home at Kennington not later than half-past twelve.

He lived with his mother and sister, in a very small house, in a squalid little street. His address mattered nothing to him, for he would never have dreamt of asking any one to come and see him at home. For board and lodging he paid Mrs. Jupp ten-and-sixpence a week, out of which sum he expected her to provide him with succulent breakfasts, with savoury suppers when he chose to return early, with a substantial dinner on Sundays, and with bitter ale to his heart's content. The mother grumbled privately, but stinted nothing. Miss Jupp, on the other hand, made frequent protest, and quarrelled with her brother every Sunday. She, a girl of twenty-two, worked very hard at the making of baby linen; of necessity nearly all her earnings went to the support of the house, and every year her temper grew more acrid.

One other person there was who had a decided opinion as to John Jupp's domestic behaviour. Martha Pimm knew the family through having lodged in the same house with them some years ago;

she kept up an acquaintance with Ada Jupp, and learnt from her all about the brother's gross selfishness. 'I wish *I* was his sister, that's all!' she often remarked, and her eyes twinkled with scorn. The truth was that, in days gone by, Jupp had allowed Miss Pimm to suspect that he regarded her with a certain interest ; she gave him neither encouragement nor the reverse, and presently, as his position improved, John began to spend his leisure elsewhere ; nowadays they very seldom saw each other.

His income fluctuated, but for the last three years he had averaged an annual three hundred pounds, and of this he spent every penny upon himself. Whatever the difficulties and hardships at home, it never occurred to him to supplement his weekly ten-and-sixpence. In all sincerity he believed that he had barely sufficient for his wants. He groaned over the laundry bill, and thought it a hard thing that his mother would not discharge this out of what he gave her. If the cooking were not to his taste he piped querulously, and threatened to take rooms in a lodging-house, where his modest wants could be decently attended to. He wrangled with his sister about halfpence charged by her for the mending of his socks. With the cares of the house he would have nothing whatever to do ; on one occasion he gently refused a loan to make up the rent, and Mrs. Jupp had to visit the pawnbroker.

He did not care to encounter Martha Pimm, for

she always looked and spoke in a way that made him feel uneasy. After such meeting he continued to think of her in spite of himself. She was rather a comely girl, and very sprightly ; had a good-natured 'cheekiness' of tone that sat well on her ; altogether, the kind of young woman that a fellow might get to think too much of. Jupp had not the slightest intention of marrying until he could find a wife with money ; he wanted capital to start a business for himself. But he was by no means insensible to female charm, and he thought it just as well to keep out of Martha's way.

But one evening, when he had come home early to have a cheap supper, he found Miss Pimm in the dingy little sitting-room. She was high-coloured and in a state of joyous animation.

'Hallo !' he exclaimed at the door. 'That you ?'

'Used to be,' Martha replied, perkily.

'What's up ? Come in for a fortune ?'

Martha gave a ringing laugh, which was moderately joined in by Mrs. Jupp and her daughter.

'There's many a true word said in joke,' she observed, with a little toss of the head.

It came out that Miss Pimm had actually inherited possessions. Her stepfather, a rag merchant in Bermondsey, a snuffy, grimy, miserly old fellow, had died at Guy's Hospital after a long illness. Martha had been to visit him now and then, though she hardly counted him a relative ; she pitied the

poor old curmudgeon, and made him a promise that he should not be buried by the parish. To her, by formal testament, the dying man bequeathed all he had, which, on inquiry in a certain indicated quarter, proved to be a matter of two or three thousand pounds, shrewdly invested.

John Jupp listened with wide eyes.

‘And what are you going to do with it?’ he asked.

‘Spend it all on myself, of course—like other people that has lots o’ money.’

Jupp laughed—the allusion was not dark to him ; but it left his withers unwrung. Long ago he had learnt to despise such rebukes.

But that night he lay awake for an unusual time. Two thousand pounds was a sum of money ; he could see his way to making use of it. And it was wonderful how Martha Pimm had improved since he last met her. Had the money brought that fine colour to her cheeks ? She was rather off-hand with him, but that meant pique at his neglect. If he chose to alter his tone, to approach the girl flatteringly—why, a man of his advantages, personal and other, was not likely to condescend in vain.

He took the resolve ; he began to seek Martha’s society.

She lived with a widowed aunt of hers, who kept a small tobacco-shop in a street off Kennington Road. The girl performed a multiplicity of services : waiting

upon a female lodger, helping in the general domestic work (her aunt had four young children), and frequently attending to customers. This life was not altogether to her taste, and she could have earned more money by resuming her former occupation of dressmaking ; but it would have been difficult for Mrs. Pimm to find any one else able and willing to give such thorough assistance : Martha's goodness of heart found compensation for the things she relinquished.

When the children were abed Mrs. Pimm and her niece took turns at sitting behind the counter, evening by evening. And presently Mr. Jupp began to patronise the little place for his cigars, tobacco, and other trifles : he would pass along the street about nine o'clock, and peep in just to see whether Martha was there. If so he took a chair, and talked genially, sometimes for an hour or more.

'Don't you want a commission ?' Martha asked one evening, when he at length bought a box of vestas and prepared to depart.

'Commission ?'

'You're a sort of advertisement for the shop, you know. It brings custom when people see a swell like you sitting here.'

Jupp laughed ; he was flattered.

'I must think about it. Suppose we have a walk together one of these evenings, and talk it over ?'

There was a sly smile on Martha's lips. She behaved as though the young man's advances were not at all disagreeable. It seemed to John that she had no suspicion of the motive which truly actuated him. All the same, he would be prudent; there must be no direct love-making yet awhile. Enough that he ingratiated himself by frequent exhibition of his spotless hats, his diverse neckties, the flower in his buttonhole. He studied a manner of suave politeness—and Jupp believed that, like Samuel Johnson, he was well-bred to a degree of needless scrupulosity.

Martha consented to take a walk with him. Not to shame his gentility, she donned her best attire, and in the summer evening they sauntered as far as Westminster. In the fulness of his heart John proposed that they should enter a confectioner's. Martha gaily assented, and merrily made choice of the most expensive delicacies; she ate with such a hearty appetite that her companion, who had calculated on an expenditure of sixpence, found that he had two or three shillings to pay. It made him tremble with wrath; but he commanded his countenance, and thought on the ragman's legacy.

Before they parted he asked if he might take her to the theatre next Saturday. There was a good piece at the Adelphi.

'I should like it awfully!' exclaimed the girl.
'But you must take your sister as well.'

‘Oh, nonsense! It’ll spoil all the fun.’

Martha insisted. She would not go unless Ada Jupp were of the company.

‘I shall come and see her to-morrow, and tell her you’re going to take us,’ she said with childlike exultation. ‘You’re very nice, you know; much nicer than I thought.’

Jupp grinned in torment. Never mind; if this was the way to win her, all right. A rapid computation, and he had decided that he would risk the bait.

He reached home the next evening about eight o’clock, and had not been in the house many minutes—just time enough to exhibit unusual surliness—when Martha came.

‘What do you think, Ada!’ she cried, on entering the kitchen, where Mrs. Jupp and her daughter were ironing linen, ‘your brother’s going to take us to the Adelphi on Saturday, you and me—to the upper circle!’

The listeners stood amazed. John, in the background, grinned horribly. He had intended seats in the pit.

‘How can *I* go?’ said Ada, pettishly. ‘I haven’t a decent thing to put on.’

‘Then you’ll have to get ’em. Your brother will pay for ’em, I’m sure.’

‘Hollo! Who said so?’ cried a choking voice.

But it was overwhelmed by Martha’s laughing

protest. What! he wouldn't buy a hat and jacket for his own sister—a man rolling in money as he was! Of course that was only his fun. And in five minutes the whole thing was arranged. Martha suggested the shop where Ada's new trappings should be purchased. She herself would go with the girl, and assist her choice.

'I can't stay any longer, now. I only just looked in for a minute. I suppose you ain't walking my way, Mr. Jupp?'

John was led off, gnashing his teeth, and secretly vowing a future vengeance, but supported by the reflection that already Martha could not keep away from him.

'You don't mean to go on working for your aunt, do you?' he asked, as they walked away, venturing for the first time upon delicate ground.

'It wouldn't be kind to leave her all at oncet, you know.'

'And where are you going when you *do* leave here?'

Martha seemed embarrassed.

'I don't know. I haven't thought about it. Time enough when I get my money. I'm going to see the lawyer again next week.'

He made inquiries, in a jesting tone, and the girl informed him of all he desired to know. The money was absolutely for her own use; she had learnt the nature of the investments, and what they produced.

John expressed an anxious hope that her lawyer was an honest man ; he offered his services as a man of business. But Martha had an air of complete confidence ; she smiled her sweetest, and John felt an unwonted flutter in his breast.

That evening at the theatre was the beginning of a round of delights. When Jupp proposed another entertainment, Martha insisted that he should take his mother this time ; she knew it was so long since poor Mrs. Jupp had been anywhere at all. But the widow was even worse provided in the matter of costume than her daughter, and Martha, having purposely led the conversation to this point, one evening at the Jupps', took upon herself to promise that John, like the excellent son he was, would buy his mother a whole new outfit. And she gained her point. By this time, John, whether conqueror or not, was undoubtedly himself subdued ; he could not let an evening pass without seeing Martha. He offered her presents, but, to his surprise and relief, Martha would have none of them ; he might pay for entertainments, and for little feasts as much as he liked, but of gifts from hand to hand she would not hear. Never had Mrs. Jupp and Ada known such a season of gaiety. Wherever Martha went with her cavalier, one or other of them, and sometimes both, went also. Theatres, music-halls, Kensington Exhibitions, shows at Westminster, the Crystal Palace, Rosherville Gardens—all were visited in turn, and

invariably with a maximum of expense to Mr Jupp. He groaned after each expedition like a man with colic; in the privacy of his home he had fits of frenzied wrath; but still the expenditure ceased not, for Martha ruled him with her laughing eye and her 'cheeky' words, and he always reminded himself that the ragman's legacy would make abundant reparation. Miss Pimm spent a great deal of time at the Jupps' house, and never went away without suggesting—that is to say, commanding—some outlay or trouble for the comfort of Mrs. Jupp and Ada. Their rooms were in a disgraceful state; John had to call in the services of paper-hanger and upholsterer. The roof leaked; John had to badger the landlord until it was seen to. All sorts of things were wanted for the kitchen; John had to buy them. Finally, one evening of autumn, as he and Martha walked idly in Kennington Road, the girl said to him:

'I tell you what it is: you don't pay half enough for your board and lodging, you know.'

He checked his steps.

'What! after all I've done for them! Why, I've spent pounds, pounds!'

'Well; it's no more than you ought to have done. Fancy, only ten-and-sixpence a week. Make it a pound.'

'A pound! Do you suppose I'm made of money?'

The discussion brought him to a point already

several times approached. When was Martha going to marry him? Come, now, he had waited a long time. She knew that he was nothing but a downright slave to her. If he could only say all he felt——

‘When did it begin?’ asked Martha, slyly.

‘Begin? Why, years ago. I’ve been fond of you ever since I first saw you——’

The girl laughed noisily. She would not allow him to be sentimental, would not discuss the question of marriage. As on each previous occasion, she put him off with the vaguest references to a future time. And John had to go home thus unsatisfied. He had a bad taste in his mouth; he felt bilious. What if Martha had only played with him? And the money he had spent in pursuit of her, of the legacy! That night he raged at his mother and his sister. They were in a plot to rob him. He would sell all the new furniture he had bought them, and go off to lodgings in another house. Mrs. Jupp, seriously concerned, talked of Martha, and tried to assure him that the girl was ready to be his wife, only he must let her take her own time. Ada answered wrath with wrath, and said it served him right, whatever happened; he was a sneak and a skinflint; he had only made up to Martha when she came in for money, and did he suppose a girl couldn’t see that?

There was a terrific uproar in the house. After the women, worn out with disputation, had gone to

bed, John sat up for an hour drinking bitter ale, accompaniment to bitter thoughts.

The next day he had an unpleasant interview with the partners of his firm. 'Our Mr. Jupp' no longer stood in such high favour with these gentlemen as a year ago, partly because of a falling-off in their business, partly as a result of John's personal demeanour lately. It had always been John's weakness to pose as indispensable; as long as they thought him so, his employers gladly bore with this trait, but when it appeared to them that he was no longer so skilful as of old in the hunt for orders, they grew disposed to resent his loftiness as mere impudence. The business, they remarked, stood in need of a decided impulse, and Mr. Jupp, it seemed to them, had begun to exhibit laxity. One of them suspected underhand dealing; somebody had been whispering that Jupp had in view an enterprise of his own, and that he might already be estranging the connections of the house in his own interests. Briefly, there was what is called a 'rumpus,' and when it ended in Jupp's announcing that their engagement might terminate whenever his employers chose, that confirmed them in their suspicion. John had notice to take himself elsewhere at an early date.

Very well. It was now his business to arrive at an understanding with Martha Pimm. This very night he would have it out with her, and he doubted not of success.

The little shop put up its shutters at ten. Just as the boy employed for this purpose had finished his work, Jupp pushed open the door. Martha was behind the counter, putting things in order for the night. She looked up and smiled, but not at all in her wonted way ; rather as she might have greeted any strange customer.

‘What can I do for you, Mr. Jupp?’

‘Hollo ! What’s the matter?’

‘Matter ? Nothing that I know of.’

She was friendly, but distant. After a few minutes’ idle talk, she again asked him what he had come for.

‘Aunt has gone to bed, and I want to get the place locked up.’

Speaking, she turned off one jet of gas, and lowered another, so that they stood in a dim light. Jupp leaned to her across the counter, and began to plead. It was singular love-making ; the man’s voice, and even his words, strongly suggested the insistence of a commercial traveller who is representing the merits of some new ‘line.’ Martha interrupted him.

‘Are you going to give your mother a pound a week?’ she asked, in a tone of good-humoured interest.

‘I will ! I promise you, Martha. Only let’s settle the time of our marriage, there’s a dear girl.’

‘Oh, there’s plenty of time to think of that.’

He interrupted her with a thump on the counter, and began to speak in a thick, angry voice. He wouldn't be played with ; she had as good as promised to marry him long ago ; did she think he was to be fooled in this way ? From Martha came a sharp reply : she had never hinted in word or look that she meant to marry him ; who was *he* to talk to her like this ? Let him go and behave decently to his mother and sister, and show that he wasn't such a selfish cur as he used to be, and then it would be time enough to ask a girl to marry him. As he listened, Jupp's face became livid.

'Look 'ere !' he exclaimed, again thumping the counter. 'You've gone too far to draw back. You've got to marry me !'

'Who ? Me ?' cried Martha. 'Marry *you* ? A man as comes making up to me just when he hears I've had money left, and before that thought too much of himself to look at me ! Not me indeed !'

Thwarted passion and baffled interest made such a whirl in the man's brain that he lost all control of himself. When Martha had ceased speaking, he stood for a moment staring her in the face with round, idiotic eyes ; then he raised his right hand and dealt her a ringing box on the ear. Martha tottered aside, and gave a cry, but of astonishment rather than of pain or fright. It brought Jupp to his senses ; terrified at what he had done, he turned on his heels

and bolted into the street. The door stood wide open behind him.

On the morrow he carried out his oft-repeated threat, and took lodgings in another part of London. From that day Mrs. Jupp and Ada saw nothing of him for many months, and of course received no more of his bounty. After waiting in vain for a visit from Martha Pimm, Ada went to see the girl. Martha was quite herself, but professed that she knew nothing whatever of Mr. Jupp. She came no more to her friend's house, and before very long her aunt removed from the little shop to one much larger in Brixton Road, where Martha took the tobacconist business seriously in hand, and to all appearances it thrived.

When something like a year had passed Martha Pimm and Ada Jupp met by chance on a Bank holiday at the Crystal Palace. Martha was accompanied by two of her little cousins, and had a look of frank enjoyment; Ada was walking about alone, looked rather cheerless, and wore the dress which her brother had so reluctantly purchased for her more than twelve months ago. They approached each other, and talked. Martha was just going to get seats for the afternoon concert; she made the lonely girl join her. Subsequently she took her and the children to have tea, not a 'ninepenny,' but a really festive meal at the exclusive tables. And here, bending forward, she asked with a smile what had become of John.

‘He’s been married about three months,’ Ada replied.

‘Who to?’ the other inquired, with a merry twinkle in her eyes.

‘A publican’s widow. She had money—of course. And he’s gone into the public line with her. The ’ouse is at ’Ammersmith.’

Martha relieved her feelings in a laugh of the most undeniable mirthfulness.

‘Is he ’appy?’

‘I don’t know. We never see nothing of him.’

But in due time Martha had an answer to her inquiry; she came upon it in a newspaper, of date some half a year subsequent to that Bank holiday. Here she read of one John Jupp, publican, who had answered a summons to the police-court, where he was charged with certain irregularities in the conduct of this business, chiefly the permission of gambling on the premises. The case was amusing; it gave scope to the reporter’s humour. Mr. Jupp appeared before the magistrates with a very black black-eye, interrogated as to which, he made known that it was bestowed upon him by his wife, with whom he lived in anything but ideal felicity. Mrs. Jupp, he asserted, was no better than a ‘she demon;’ to her he attributed all the ill report which had gathered about his house. Whereupon from another part of the court there sounded a fierce shout, or rather yell; it came from the lady in question; she shrieked

menaces at her husband, and quietness could only be restored by her forcible removal. In the end, Mr. John Jupp found himself mulcted in a heavy fine, and retired disconsolate.

Having read this bit of drama, Martha Pimm laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks.

Two months later, on a dreary November morning, she received at her shop in Brixton a letter of which the signature greatly surprised her. John Jupp wrote to ask if she would grant him an interview. He wished particularly to see her and as soon as possible, and he remained hers very faithfully. The address he appended was other than that of the house at Hammersmith. Martha at once wrote a reply, inviting him to come that very evening.

And he came about eight o'clock. Martha received him in a sitting-room above the shop. Seedily habited, and with a face which made suggestion of fresh assaults from his vigorous spouse, John moved humbly forward.

'Miss Pimm,' he began, stopping at a few paces from her, 'I am leaving London, and I wish before I go to ask your pardon for—for something I did a long time ago.'

'Oh, you do, Mr. Jupp, do you?' Martha replied, checking herself from laughter.

'Yes. In earnest I do. I ought to have come long ago, but I was ashamed, and that's the truth.'

I'm leaving London—I've got a little place in the Midlands, in fact, though I don't care to mention where it is, not even to you. And I want to hear as you've forgiven me.'

'And what good'll it do you, Mr. Jupp?'

Standing, he entered upon a narrative of his matrimonial experiences. It lasted a quarter of an hour, and the listener enjoyed herself as at a play; but she did not laugh. When he was silent she said that he hadn't behaved to her exactly like a gentleman, but that she too had something with which to reproach herself; she pardoned him freely, and wished him better luck.

But John still kept his position.

'Anything else you want to say, Mr. Jupp?'

'Only this, Miss Pimm. At my age of one-and-thirty I am a broken and a penniless man. I'm going away to 'ide my 'ead. You've been doing well, and I'm glad to see it. What I want to ask is—could you find it in your 'art to offer me a little help?'

Martha looked at him for full a minute, during which he kept his eyes down. Then she felt in her pocket and produced a purse.

'How much did you think of asking?' she inquired gravely, but with a curious hint of mirth about her twitching mouth.

'Oh!' his note was joyful. 'I leave that to you,

Miss Pimm. I never thought I should come to this——'

'Would ten pounds be any use?'

'T—ten?' He had not hoped for so much, and consequently felt aggrieved that it was not more. 'Oh, thank you! I think ten pounds would give me a nice little start. You see, Miss Pimm, I haven't a penny of my own. The house is my wife's—all the money is hers. I've had to save myself from her with just what I stand up in——'

'All right. Wait a minute while I go downstairs.'

Martha had been examining the contents of her purse; she now hurriedly put back the coins, and in doing so allowed half a sovereign to fall to the floor. It fell noiselessly upon the carpet, but not unobserved by Mr. Jupp's eye. His head was perked forward; he seemed about to draw attention to the accident; but as Martha walked away in seeming unconsciousness of what had happened, he stood still and spoke not a word.

She was absent five minutes, then reappeared with a ten-pound note in her hand. Advancing to her former place she looked on the ground, but not in a way to excite Jupp's attention. He, meanwhile, stood just where she had left him.

'Well, here's ten pounds,' she said, eyeing him strangely, severely.

'I thank you with all my 'art, dear Miss Pimm !'

'With that,' she continued, her voice hardening, '*and the ten shillings you've just stolen*, you ought to make a nice start, don't you think ?'

He staggered and turned deadly pale.

'Stolen—ten shillings—what d'you mean ?'

Martha pointed to the floor.

'I saw it drop, and I thought I'd try you. I wanted to see what sort of a man you really were—understand ? I shall give you the ten pounds all the same. I wouldn't have given a penny, only I've felt that I made rather a fool of you once—you remember ? I never felt sorry for you, and now I see I was right. Just take yourself off, Mr. Jupp, before I pay you back something you once gave me, though I hadn't asked for it !'

And he turned and slunk away, in his fingers the squeezed banknote, in his pocket the half-sovereign.

THE MEDICINE MAN

ONE could not say that Dr. Bobbett had lost caste, for his birth was of the humblest, and education had done little towards polishing his manners. His social decline seemed very much in the nature of things ; cursing his folly, he none the less adjusted himself to circumstances, and without any great effort. For a moment he had emerged ; thanks to his father, the shoemaker, he found himself a qualified medical man, and became the assistant of a respectable practitioner in a London suburb ; then his father died, and, with the help of a small sum of money that fell to him, Bobbett ruined himself. It was all very well to start an independent practice, but less advisable to marry a woman of no character and inclined to drink. At thirty or so Bobbett was adrift. After some years of grimy experience, he managed to open his 'dispensary,' and a year or two more brought him the only kind of professional success he could now hope for. To work as a healer, amid the press of obscure and often miserable mortality, would appear to some men no ignoble lot ; but Dr. Bobbett was incapable of illusions concerning the people with

whom he lived, and had no temptation to mask his own motives. He had got rid of his fatal wife, but, at the same time, had lost all ambition. Like the wise man of old, though in a somewhat different sense, he knew that he knew nothing. His scientific acquirements, never more than the barely sufficient, were blurred in a squalid past, and rule-of-thumb answered well enough for his day and night practice among folk infinitely more ignorant than himself.

He was strongly built and coarse-featured, with a distrustful, defiant eye, a flattish nose, a broad mouth showing teeth the worse for tobacco. When attending patients in his dispensary (which stood between a pawnbroker's shop and a small eating-house), he wore no coat, and often no collar ; the wrist-bands of his shirt were frayed and dirty, and his hands never fastidiously clean ; from his waistcoat pocket protruded a pair of scissors ; under his arm-pit was thrust a handkerchief. At intervals he came forth from his consulting-chamber, and surveyed, with a genial grin, the coughing, hawking, chattering group that sat in the bare, ill-smelling ante-room.

'You there again ?' he would perchance remark to some haggard scarecrow. 'Got the money ?'

The reply, as likely as not, would begin with semi-articulate irrelevancies, which the doctor speedily cut short.

'Off with you ! Go to the hospital. Now then, next patient.'

There was no hospital less than a mile away—a fact not disregarded by Dr. Bobbett when he chose the locality of his practice. For an ordinary consultation, with medicine, he charged one shilling, occasionally smaller sums, and it was no unusual thing for him to see thirty patients in the course of an evening. When summoned to a house, which generally happened after midnight, his charge was regulated by circumstances. In every such case he thrust his head out of the window, and, after hearing what was the matter, asked, ‘Have you got the money?’ Unless payment were made in advance, he firmly refused to set forth. In Dr. Bobbett’s part of London this behaviour was strictly professional; it could only be taxed with inhumanity by one completely a stranger to Dr. Bobbett’s experience.

In course of time he found it necessary to engage an assistant. The applicants for such a post would be numerous enough, but Dr. Bobbett was saved the trouble of choice by a happy accident. Late one night, in the West-End, where he had sought an hour’s relaxation in casual society, he encountered an old acquaintance, a fellow ‘medical’ of his earliest student days. This man, Dent by name, having even less aptitude for the profession than Bobbett himself, had never reached a diploma: by ways of vulgar dissipation he fell to shifts for bare life, and now, after years of vagabondage, was hungering as clerk in the office of a money-lender. Mr. Dent suffered

from the common complaint of indolence : in conversation with Bobbett he called it rheumatic gout. They recognised each other at a drinking-bar, where Bobbett's peculiar voice, raised in facetious colloquy with a female companion, struck on the ear of his quondam friend. Dent, much given to the melting mood when his pocket allowed him to frequent places such as this, shed tears of joy. He was a weak, aimless, soft-hearted fellow, incapable of rascality as of reasonable effort, wont to chide the fates that had dealt so hardly with him, and abounding in foolish gratitude to any one who gave him even contemptuous notice. Walking eastward, arm-in-arm with Bobbett, who was nearly twice his size, he poured forth a very honest account of himself. The Doctor listened and reflected.

'I tell you what,' said Bobbett bluntly ; 'I want a dispenser. Ten bob a-week and your grub. What do you say ?'

'How can I dispense ? I've forgotten——'

The Doctor interrupted with an unsavoury expletive. Half-an-hour's instruction would be all that was needed. In short, he would take no refusal ; and the very next day Mr. Dent compounded drugs at the dispensary. Truly, it was no difficult matter to make up Dr. Bobbett's prescriptions. What the patients chiefly regarded was quantity. Having to bring their own receptacles, most of them came with wine bottles, and Bobbett rarely sent them away with

less than full measure. The assistant, who retained something of a fair education, viewed with astonishment many of his employer's proceedings, but he allowed himself no comments, and only after a week or two of shrewd observation did Bobbett disclose the purpose which had been in his mind from the first.

‘Look here, Jack, my work’s getting a bit too heavy for me. I want you to give a hand; take an evening or two with the patients, and go out at night now and then. What do you say?’

Dent was startled, but less seriously than he would have been a few days ago. He made a timid objection, met by the Doctor with good-natured ribaldry. As they sat over their drinks in the consulting-room Dr. Bobbett grew communicative and philosophical.

‘We’ve got to live, my son, and there’s many a less honest way. The —— fact of the matter is that you and I are just as good doctors for people of this sort as if we’d both got our —— M.D. Yes, and a damned sight better! As you see, it’s mostly women, and I defy any man living to put low-class women through a course of treatment unless he’s got them in a hospital. Do you suppose they do what I tell them? Do you suppose they take the right doses or at the right times, or do any single thing as they are told to do it? They *can’t*! If their —— lives depend upon it, they can’t! They come to a doctor

just to ease their minds with talking, and get a quart or two of stuff to swallow whenever they think of it. I'm telling you the plain God's truth. They're so blasted ignorant that they don't understand what medical treatment means. It's a superstition; a bottle of coloured stuff, for internal or external use, is a *charm*, and nothing else. Know what I mean by that? Yes, of course you do. You remember the "medicine man" in Indian stories; that's what we are. If I gave them a bit of wood to hang round their necks, they'd do it, and be as pleased as Punch, and come telling me it had done them no end of good. And what's the use of science for people of that sort? Of course, I'm speaking of ordinary complaints. There's midwifery and surgery—I shouldn't put you on to those jobs—at all events, not just yet. But the bulk of a practice such as this is just fooling, and you're as competent as I am, or any other man. We have to treat pretty much as we should have done if we'd lived in the Middle Ages. If they get well so much the better. If they don't, why, there was no help for it—out of a hospital. You shall begin to-morrow. You may have a bit of trouble at first: they'll be wanting to see *me*; but you've got a soft way of speaking, and I shouldn't wonder if a lot of them come to prefer Dr. Dent to Dr. Bobbett. He's a rough-tongued sort of —, is Dr. Bobbett!'

So, on specified terms, the arrangement **cam**

about, and with issue satisfactory to all concerned save, perhaps, to those patients whom neither of the practitioners could save from gloomy Avernus. For Dr. Bobbett, though in unpolished phrase, had uttered a truth which should be laid to heart by all excessively anxious about the ignorant poor. The day arrived when Dr. Dent, long since instructed out of scruple, did not shrink even from furnishing a death certificate. To be sure, he signed it with the name of his qualified partner, but that was a mere formality.

RAW MATERIAL

‘FROM the registry, mum ! They informed me that you was in want of a domestic ’elp.’

And she stood with head aside, amiably ogling from beneath drooped eyelids. A perfume hung about her ; she was dressed with cheap elaboration and spoke as one conscious of refinement.

Mrs. Pool since her marriage a few months ago had suffered from two general servants. The state of her health made it absolutely necessary that she should find a trustworthy person to help in the little house, but she was nervous, diffident, and without the practical instinct. This young woman from the registry-office rather overawed her, but, after the late experiences, she was tempted by a show of personal cleanliness—a suggestion of sympathetic good-nature. There ensued a conversation in the eight-foot square drawing-room. The applicant talked freely of herself, with a gentle, languid air of long endurance. She *had* been a lady’s maid ; she *had* received very high wages ; but, oh ! the unkindness, the humiliations she had had to put up

with ; What she wanted was a 'ome. She would work her fingers to the bone for a kind, considerate mistress—such a one as Mrs. Pool seemed to be. Her health ? She had never had a day's illness. She might not look it, but she was very strong ; and, as for early rising, she couldn't understand how any one lay in bed after six o'clock. Wages were a matter of total indifference to her, if only she could find a real 'ome ; and in the matter of evenings out, she respected herself far too much to run about the streets of London after dark. She had the highest references, but nothing would persuade her to appeal for a character to her last mistress. After the heartless treatment she had received—— ! But if the clergyman of St. Peter's hadn't unfortunately died two months ago——

With a sigh of timid hopefulness, the young wife engaged her, and at nine o'clock in the evening (having promised to come at six) Minnie arrived. She was so sorry to be late ; it was all the fault of the greengrocer's boy, who had promised to come punctually for her box, and kept her waiting. Oh, what a nice little bedroom ! Here she could be 'appy for the rest of her life ! And she must begin work this very night ; indeed, she could not sleep until she had done something, if it were only cleaning knives or boots.

Her box was a very small one, and on the next day she pathetically made known to Mrs. Pool that

all but the last of her garments had gone to pay the expenses of an illness brought on by overwork and harsh treatment at her last place. Delicacy prevented the mistress from showing surprise, and, on her promising an advance of wages, Minnie was touched almost to tears. All day long Minnie moved about the house with a duster in her hand, save when she was encouraging Mrs. Pool's efforts to show her how to prepare food and to lay the table ; her eyes beamed with mild contentment ; she hummed to herself the latest melody of the streets. Incessant was her flow of gently patronising talk. ' And to think you should have had such dirty creatures ! What a *shime* ! I'm sure *I* don't know what servants is coming to. Why, if you ask *me*, I should think a girl ought to think herself lucky when she gets such a place as this ! And you'd like me to buy caps, wouldn't you, mum ? I had such nice ones at my last place, but they worn out in the washing. Perhaps it would be convenient to let me run round to a shop this evening ? I shouldn't be more than a quarter of an hour, or twenty minutes at the outside.'

Mrs. Pool's husband was a junior clerk in a Government office, a young man whose energies had been somewhat over-tried by a series of competitive examinations. The new servant did not impress him altogether favourably, but he kept back his misgivings, and lent willing ear to a hopeful story of

Minnie's commencement. When the girl chanced to approach him, she let her eyes slide across his countenance, then dropped them, with a half-smile of excessive modesty. He observed uneasily the perfume she carried about with her, and at length remarked on this matter to his wife. It was on the third day, and already a look of worry had begun to reappear on Mrs. Pool's countenance.

'I'm afraid there are several little things I shall have to speak about,' said the young wife; 'she doesn't seem quite to understand cooking, and—and she hasn't touched the scrubbing-brush yet. But we must give her time.'

'Of course—of course,' rejoined Pool cheerily. 'Just look upon her as raw material, and exert yourself to make a good servant out of her. No doubt you can—no doubt whatever.'

A difficulty had arisen with respect to diet. Minnie seemed to eat nothing whatever, and, when her mistress made timid inquiries, she confessed a chronic lack of appetite.

'I seem to have such a delicate stomach, mum. It isn't the food—oh dear, no! I'm sure the food couldn't be better. I'm afraid my stomach was spoiled at the last place, where she made me live on such food as you'd never believe. Perhaps, if I could have a little potted meat, it might tempt me at breakfast.'

'But don't you eat a great many sweets?' asked

Mrs. Pool, who had noticed that the girl seemed to have something of the kind in her mouth perpetually.

‘Sweets? Oh, *no!* I never touch such things, they’re so bad for the teeth. Oh, I remember! I did suck a little bit of peppermint yesterday. I’ve been told it’s good for a weakly stomach.’

It began to be borne in upon Mrs. Pool that Minnie sometimes varied from the truth. A few days more, and she seriously doubted whether the girl ever uttered a veracious word. In her ceaseless gossip Minnie had contradicted herself times innumerable. More than that, she seemed to be yielding to a physical languor which made her useless in the house; once, on returning from shopping, Mrs. Pool found her asleep, with her head on the kitchen table, and beside it a penny novelette. She rose late of a morning, and at night had a disinclination to go to bed. Such work as she pretended to do her mistress had to do over again. At the first grave remonstrance she raised her eyebrows in a look half distressful, half insolent, and declared an unbounded surprise that she was not ‘giving satisfaction.’

However loth to trouble her husband, Mrs. Pool was at length obliged to seek his counsel.

‘The truth is, dear, she has had no experience whatever in housework. Of course, it was very foolish

not to insist on a character. I really can't imagine what she has been.'

'Well, well! I dare say she'll improve. We must regard her as raw material.'

Every other evening, Minnie, with profuse apologies, requested leave to go out for half an hour, and she never returned till after ten o'clock. Resolved upon firmness, Mrs. Pool at length refused permission; she herself wished to spend the evening at a friend's house. Pool remained at home, and sat reading. Not long after his wife's departure a timorous knock sounded at the sitting-room door, and Minnie entered, bringing with her a waft of perfume.

'I'm so sorry, sir, that I don't seem to be giving satisfaction——'

A tear trembled on her eyelids, and she stood with bent head, hands clasped before her. The young man regarded her uneasily. She had decked herself more elaborately than usual, and looked rather pretty. Half closing the door, she came a step or two nearer.

'If you'd be so kind as to tell me, sir, how I can please mistress——'

'Why, the fact is, Minnie, you seem to do nothing at all. And this perpetual going out at night, you know——'

'If you only knew how hard I've tried, sir!' she

sobbed. 'I've had no mother since I was eight years old, and brought up with strangers, and had to work for my own living these years and years——'

'But, my good girl, you *don't* work.'

Minnie came still nearer, and fixed upon him a look of tearful languishment. Pool felt more uncomfortable.

'I suffer from such a lonely feeling like, sir. If I thought there was any one as cared for me—if you'd give me a kind word of encouragement, sir——'

The man pulled himself together, and spoke energetically, though not harshly: thereupon bade her go back to the kitchen. Minnie moved away very slowly, and, from the doorway, cast one languishing look behind.

Another fortnight, and Mrs. Pool's patience was exhausted. When Minnie stayed out one night till twelve o'clock, and came back with flushed cheeks, incoherent talk, that was the end. The girl left next morning, shedding floods of tears, and all but prevailing with her soft-hearted mistress to be allowed a new trial. But Pool would suffer no such weakness. The girl must take her mendacious incompetence elsewhere; it was not incumbent upon *them* to save her from herself.

About half a year later, Pool was passing one night down Villiers Street to the Railway station.

Near the music-hall a girl put herself in his way ; looking into her face, he recognised Minnie. At once she turned from him, and he walked quickly on.

Minnie—no longer raw material, but a finished article of commerce.

TWO COLLECTORS

THE delight of his youth had become the burden of his old age. Forty years ago Wormald desired nothing better than to spend a whole day in book-hunting. Regardless of fatigue and of shoe-leather, he tramped the London pavement, rifling fourpenny-boxes, and handling enviously the volumes he could not afford. To-day, he still collected, but not for himself; he was 'collector' in the trade sense of the word, at a large bookseller's. Every morning he set forth with his list of works to be procured from the publisher or sought at second-hand shops. The pavement was harder now than of old. About noon his legs grew shaky, and often enough he breathed a malison on the heavy volumes that strained his stooping back.

Could he but creep into some quiet corner, and there lie unmolested, with never a book in sight!

Forty years ago he pictured for himself quite another close of life. He bore a brain; the world must yield before him; poverty could not repress his noble rage. Nor was specific hope denied. There

came the moneyed friend, who read and admired his poems—yea, who bore the expense of printing them. A glorious day! His little blue volume was the latest birth of time; for this had the great world toiled and travailed through ages numberless; with this began a new era! Reviewers gave it but a chilly welcome, the little blue volume. The public sought it not. No matter! What was the reception of 'Endymion'? What of 'The Revolt of Islam'?

In those days he had a fine head of hair, a beaming eye, ripe lips that smiled seductively or with disdain. If hunger pinched him, he did not much care. It was natural to him to walk with gallant mien—*erectos ad sidera tollere vultus*. Now, the poor old hat served to disguise his baldness; his eyes were rheumy, dim; he plodded looking on the ground. The world had been too strong for him. No second volume had ever come forth with his name on the title-page, and of the little blue book not even he possessed a copy. All he once owned had gone to wreck—scattered like the memories of his life in waste places, in remote deeps.

One morning as he stood in the shop making up his collecting-book, writing to dictation, an incredible thing happened.

'“Songs of Youth.” By Alfred Wormald. Robinson, 1852.'

His hand paused; he looked up at the dictator.

'What? I didn't quite hear——'

‘Some bygone namesake of yours, Mr. Wormald.
“Songs of Youth”——’

The details were repeated, and Wormald mechanically jotted them down. There followed a dozen other books, and the list was finished; then the collector again spoke.

‘Can you tell me whose order that is, sir?’ His voice shook a little. ‘The “Songs of Youth”——’

‘Why—you don’t mean to say——?’

‘Yes, I wrote it; I published it——’

‘Ah! Odd thing! Let me see; it’s Mr. Freshwater, of Chiswick. You probably have a copy to dispose of?’

Wormald shook his head, muttered a few indistinct remarks, and set out for the day’s work. But not in his wonted frame of mind. Instead of making doggedly towards the first point indicated by his list, he began to stray about the street, abstracted, heedless of duty. Gradually he was grasping the fact that some mortal desired to obtain his little blue volume. Such a thing had never happened in his eight years’ collectorship; nay, such a thing had never occurred to him as possible. What could it mean? Who was Mr. Freshwater, of Chiswick?

At length, having wandered quite out of his way, he checked himself, and stood staring at the nearest shop. ‘Can’t you understand? It is the very truth. Mr. Freshwater, of Chiswick, wants your book, has given a special order for it, is *eager* to obtain it. A

student of literature, no doubt ; perhaps himself a poet. Some one has spoken to him of "Songs of Youth." Some one has read passages to him. He was moved with enthusiasm, with wonder that he had never heard the name of Alfred Wormald. He wrote at once to his bookseller——'

The old man straightened himself, seemed to shake off a score of years. Having a few coppers in his pocket, he made for a public-house, and drank a glass of spirits. Now he was ready !

That day he sought in vain. Robinson, a publisher extant in 1852, had long since vanished into space—forgotten as the booksellers of old Rome. 'Songs of Youth' could not be heard of. On the morrow Wormald pursued his task, struggling against a profound discouragement. On the third day it was decided to advertise in the *Publishers' Circular*, but not until the advertisement had been repeated did it elicit a response. Then came a post-card from a bookseller of Birmingham, who could supply one copy of 'Songs of Youth,' minus fly-leaf, and in poor condition generally, price one shilling. Wormald was told of this, and his heart leapt. The time of suspense, the long tramps to every shop and stall of which he knew, had visibly enfeebled him ; he suffered now from a ceaseless trembling of one hand, and from strange sensations in the leg on the other side.

The volume, as he ascertained (it was become

something of a joke in the shop), had been despatched to Mr. Freshwater on Friday. On Saturday afternoon, having made himself as presentable as he could, the old man journeyed to Chiswick. The directory had informed him of Mr. Freshwater's address; of course, he would not allow his employers to suspect the purpose in his mind.

A large house; a fine old garden, just now in summer loveliness. Wormald shook in every limb as he approached the front door. Mr. Freshwater might not be at home: in that case it would be best to go away without leaving a name, and to write a letter. Would not the letter have been a wiser course, to begin with? Well, he was here now, and would take his chance. Yes, Mr. Freshwater was within. What name? With dry, half-paralysed tongue, he gasped 'Alfred Wormald,' then hurriedly repeated it, with the prefix 'Mister.'

And he was led through the hall into the library—a beautiful, luxurious room, the kind of room which, forty years ago, would have given his pulses a divine thrill. Mr. Freshwater stood there by his writing-table; he was a smooth-shaven, shrewd-faced man of middle-age, tending to corpulency, and he regarded the visitor with a polite surprise.

'Sir—I am Alfred Wormald.'

'Oh!—ah!—I'm afraid I don't recall your name.'

The old man tottered slightly; his eyes wavered.

‘You have received from your booksellers, sir, a copy of “Songs of Youth”——’

His tongue failed ; he had so strange a look that Mr. Freshwater began to feel uneasy.

“Songs of Youth”—have I? I suppose my librarian ordered it. A volume of poems, I suppose? How—what do you wish to see me about?’

The other, commanding himself, fixed upon Mr. Freshwater a look not without dignity.

‘You collect poetical works, sir?’

‘Why, yes, I do. But I must refer you to my librarian about that. Not *all* poetical works. I am at present getting together those published in the Victorian time by houses which have ceased to exist. Presumably, you are in the trade? Have you a catalogue? By all means send it. I shall next be turning my attention to early Victorian periodicals. But by all means send in your catalogue. You had no other business with me?’

‘Thank you, sir, that was all.’

And Wormald withdrew.

‘Queer old chap,’ Mr. Freshwater murmured to himself. ‘Broken-down bookseller, evidently. There ought to be a home for them.’

He resumed his seat and the examination of the latest volume of ‘Book Prices Current.’

AN OLD MAID'S TRIUMPH

TO this day's event Miss Hurst had looked anxiously forward for no less than thirty years. It was just thirty years since time and fate had made her dependent for a living upon her own exertions, without the least hope of aid from love or duty. Till then—that is, up to her twenty-eighth year—she had supported herself, but with frequent hospitality of kinsfolk to make the efforts lighter. Now, at eight-and-fifty, she had received from her pupils' parents, with all possible kindness of wording, the anticipated notice that after next quarter her services would be no more in request. So it had come at last, and fervently she thanked Heaven for the courage which enabled her to face it with so much composure. That there was no possibility of another engagement she took for granted ; perhaps it was only out of delicate consideration that these good friends had kept her so long. She did not feel very old ; was not conscious of mental decay ; but probably others had observed some sign of it. At such an age as this who could expect to be retained as governess to young people ? Doubtless it would be an injustice to her pupils."

Moreover, she was ready for the change ; again, Heaven be thanked !

‘ What will the poor old thing do ? ’ asked Mrs. Fletcher of her husband. ‘ Impossible, I fear, that she can have saved anything.’

‘ Don’t see how the deuce she can have done,’ Mr. Fletcher replied. ‘ There are—institutions, I believe. I wish we could do something ; but you know the state of things. Of course, a rather larger cheque—say double the quarter’s salary ; but I’m afraid that’s all I can pretend to do.’

However, Miss Hurst *had* found it possible to save, though what the fact signified was known only to herself. To-night she made up her account with life, and it stood thus. At eight-and-twenty she had owned a sum of nearly thirty pounds, which ever since had remained intact. For the thirty years that followed her average earnings had been twenty-nine pounds per annum, and out of this she had put aside what amounted to fifteen pounds a year—sometimes more, sometimes less. Very seldom, indeed, had she suffered from ill-health ; only once had she spent six months unemployed. Accumulation of petty interest—the Bank and Government security were all she had ever dared to confide in—by this time made a sensible increment. With tremulous calculation she grasped the joyous certainty that a life of independence was assured to her. It must be by purchase of an annuity. She had never consulted any one on her financial

affairs : common sense, and a strictly reticent habit, had guided her safely thus far. For the last and all-important pecuniary transaction she felt thoroughly prepared, so long had she reflected upon it, and with such sedulous exactitude.

Beauty was never hers, nor much natural grace : nowadays she looked a very homely, but a very nice old lady, with something of austerity in her countenance which imposed respect. She spoke with a gentle firmness, smiling only when there was occasion for it. In education she knew herself much behind the teachers of to-day ; her mental powers were not more than ordinary ; but Nature had given her that spirit of refinement which is not otherwise to be acquired. Generally able to win the regard of well-conditioned children, she had always been looked upon as an excellent disciplinarian, which accounted in large measure for her professional success.

Her success ! Never had she received the wages of a middling cook ; yet the importance of her trust through life was such as cannot be exaggerated, and the duties laid upon her had been discharged with a competence, a conscientiousness, which no money could repay. Her success ! At the age of fifty-eight she tremblingly calculated her hope of being able to live out the rest of her life with *not less* than twenty shillings a week.

And the life history which explained this great achievement. Miss Hurst could not have writt

she possessed neither the faculty nor the self-esteem needful for such a work ; but assuredly it deserved to be written. Reflect upon the simple assertion that, from her twenty-eighth to her fifty-eighth year this woman had never unavoidably spent one shilling-piece. She, with the instincts and desires of the educated class, had never allowed herself one single indulgence which cost more than a copper or so. Ah ! the story of those holiday times which she was obliged to spend at her own cost, of the brief seasons when she was out of employment ! Being a woman, she, of course, found it easier to practise this excessive parsimony than any man would have done ; yet she was not, like so many women, naturally penurious. She longed for the delight of travel, she often hungered for books which a very slight outlay would have procured her, she reproached herself for limiting her charity to a mite at church collections. Mean lodgings were horrible to her, yet again and again she had occupied all but the meanest. And all this out of sheer dread of some day finding herself destitute, helpless, at the mercy of a world which never spares its brutality to those who perforce require its compassion. What a life ! Yet it had not embittered her ; her gentle courage, sustained by old-fashioned piety, had never failed. And now she saw herself justified of her faith in Providence.

Having regard to her sound constitution, she might live another twenty years. Her capital, merely

put out to interest, would not afford sustenance. But the purchase of an annuity might assure at once her bodily comfort and her self-respect. Carefully had she studied the tables, the comparative advantages offered by many companies. The fact that a hundred pounds will yield a woman less than a man had often troubled her ; she understood the reason, but could not quite reconcile herself to the result. As a man, she would have saved vastly more ; as a woman, the longer-lived, she must be content to receive less for her smaller opportunities.

Throughout this last quarter her behaviour differed in no outward respect from that of years past ; she worked with the same admirable honesty of purpose, and kept the same countenance of sober cheerfulness. In her heart she was ever so little troubled. At the end of her engagement there would be due to her a payment of seven pounds ten, and the total of her possessions would then fall *slightly* short of a sum needed to purchase the annuity on which she had fixed her hopes. She desired a clear fifty-two pounds per annum, twenty shillings a week : surely no excessive demand. Yet it seemed as if she must content herself with a smaller income. It might, however, prove possible to earn the extra sum—a mere trifle. Yes, it might be possible ; she would hope.

On the last day, when her pupils were preparing to leave home for the seaside, Mrs. Fletcher called her apart, and spoke with confidential sweetness.

‘Miss Hurst, need I say how very sorry we all are to part with you? I do so wish that circumstances allowed of my asking you to come back again after the holidays. But—really there is no harm in my telling you that we are obliged to—to make certain changes in our establishment.’

The governess listened with grave sympathy.

‘Have you heard of any other engagement?’ pursued the lady, with doubtful voice and eyes drooping.

‘Not yet, Mrs. Fletcher,’ was the cheerful reply; ‘I should like to find one, if it were only for a short time.’

‘I will do my utmost in the way of making inquiries. And—let me give you the cheque, Miss Hurst. My husband begs you will accept from us, as a mark of our great—our very great—esteem, something more than the sum strictly due. I am sure we shall never be out of our debt to you.’

In her own room Miss Hurst eagerly inspected the little slip of paper—it was a cheque for twice her quarter’s salary. There was a great leap of her heart, a rush of tears to her eyes. She held the security of independent life. The long fight was over, and she had triumphed.

THE INVINCIBLE CURATE

THAT was the time of penny readings, and very soon after his arrival at Donniston the Rev. Mr. Benshaw appeared on the platform of the Mechanics' Institute. His figure alone would have commanded attention—tall, muscular, thrilling with vigour; his voice, impressive to begin with, ended by startling his audience and moving the more frivolous to mirth. He recited 'Horatius,' and never had such a recitation been heard in Donniston. At passages of culminating ardour the windows rattled as though after a thunder-clap. When Mr. Benshaw ceased, the sudden silence seemed of religious intensity; the applause that followed, though sufficiently hearty, had a very feeble effect.

He was only the curate of a minor parish, but his energies soon overflowed the whole town. In a month he was acquainted with all Church people, and stood on friendly terms with many Dissenting families, a thing hitherto unheard of at Donniston. Ladies took a great interest in him, and marvelled that such a man could remain so long in a subordinate position—how unaccountable that such an

embodiment of clerical force had never been presented with a living ! In comparison with Mr. Benshaw, the beneficed clergy of the town and district became insignificant figures. The injustice must be rectified ; the Bishop must be appealed to ; patrons of livings must be awakened. Never had a curate thrown himself into his duties with such burning enthusiasm, such exhaustless physical powers. His talk was never of 'High' or of 'Low,' but of the plain mission of Christianity to the world at large. In his sermons (the mild vicar of St. Peter's cared not how often his curate relieved him in the pulpit) Mr. Benshaw dealt with vast topics, glowing and roaring in prophetic vehemence ; one seemed to hear the preacher of a new Crusade, a late-born Apostle.

Unfortunately, he was married. Donniston saw very little of Mrs. Benshaw, and after the first satisfaction of curiosity, scarcely spoke of her. Ladies recognised the trying position of the poor woman ; she lived in a tiny house, had three young children (soon to be four), and kept no servant ; a cruel state of things. As far as one could judge, she was the very antithesis of her husband : limp, colourless, of poor health, but moderately intelligent. No one ever met her out of doors ; perhaps she stole out after dark, to do her shopping in the poor district where she lived. Her house was said to be most scantily furnished, and by no means a model of

cleanliness; the children (two went to a day-school) had a neglected air, pretty but half-starved faces, and their clothing was evidently home-made. One did not like to think on how small an income the family subsisted; it was a shame, a scandal.

Mr. Benshaw had previously lived in a remote part of England; no one at Donniston had any connection with that far-off town. But in half a year's time rumours were somewhat set afloat concerning the reverend gentleman's earlier history; it began to be whispered that Mr. Benshaw had come away heavily in debt to tradesfolk. Moreover, his eldest child, a girl of thirteen, whom the curate had casually spoken of as living with a relative, was said, on some vague authority, to be in the care of a charitable person who had taken compassion on the family when they left their former home. These, and other such stories, had an effect on public feeling, the more so when it became known that Donniston shopkeepers were already complaining that Mrs. Benshaw never paid any bills. But just at this time there chanced to break out an epidemic in the lower quarters of the town, and the gossip of censure speedily gave place to new admiration, inspired by Mr. Benshaw's heroic efforts. For several weeks the curate's muscular form was splendidly prominent. He defied contagion, he knew not weariness; by sick-beds he gave proof of womanly tenderness, and his leonine voice subdued itself to softness, soothing-

murmurs. Impossible not to forget, for the moment, at all events, those unpaid shopkeepers in the remote town, and kindred grumblers at Donniston.

When the sickness came to an end, certain ladies got up a little testimonial for the curate of St. Peter's. It took the form of a silver tea-service, and those who gave it did so in the hope that Mrs. Benshaw, having evidently no use for such a luxury, would speedily dispose of it for coin of the realm. Ere a month had elapsed this actually came to pass. The curate took a journey to a large town, and returned at night with a more considerable sum of money than he had for many years possessed. When he arrived he found his wife sitting in the miserable little parlour, by a stinted fire, sewing at a child's garment; he bent over her, kissed her forehead, and stroked her hair kindly with his great fingers. Then he laid out the money before her, and they rejoiced together.

'I have been thinking very gravely'—this in his deep voice—'that some portion of this—some portion—should go towards a liquidation of the debts.'

'I'm afraid so,' replied Mrs. Benshaw, sighing.

'Nicholson's very insolent letter makes it impossible to pay *him*. He would suppose I did it out of fear, and I fear no man. It shall be Dawson. Dawson has behaved very properly. I always liked the man. He shall have twenty shillings on

account. No, he shall have thirty. More we cannot possibly afford.'

Mrs. Benshaw began a doleful recounting of all their immediate necessities. Her husband listened gravely, but in the end, as always, gave a cheery turn to the talk.

'Let us remember, dear, how much reason we have for thankfulness. Who could have imagined that Mrs. Riley—excellent woman!—would take entire charge of Harriet? I assure you, I never dreamt of it; I thought it would be for a few months at most; of course, I never hinted in the most distant manner any other desire or expectation. And now the dear child is provided for! Pray do not forget to write to Mrs. Riley at least once a month.'

'Oh,' said Mrs. Benshaw presently, 'I almost forgot to tell you. Mrs. Batt called this afternoon, and was very kind. She recommends a nurse in West Street; you must make inquiries.'

'To be sure. Excellent woman! I have a high opinion of Mrs. Batt. Did she see the children?'

'Oh, yes. She says Amy is very like her own that died. The likeness grows upon her, she says. And she asked the date of her birthday.'

'Ah!—well now, I must go round and see poor old Simkin; he may go off any day. Cheer up, dear! There are better days to come.'

Not long after this the baby was born, and Mrs. Benshaw had a perilous time. Female sympathy

was not wanting, nor yet substantial assistance. The good lady, Mrs. Batt, a comfortable widow, with a grown-up son, remained staunch in her admiration of the curate, and lavished kindness upon his wife. But in the background was that little group of Donniston tradesfolk, who continued to supply goods rarely paid for, and grumbled incessantly. In truth, the rent of his house, and sundry inevitable expenses, consumed all Mr. Benshaw's petty stipend. He owed so much in many parts of Great Britain that solvency had come to seem a hopeless ideal. Sufficient unto the day was the evil thereof. Mr. Benshaw discharged with unfailing energy what he regarded as his immediate duty, and committed the rest to Providence.

But the end was foreseen—at all events, by the vicar of St. Peter's. At the close of a twelvemonth this gentleman spoke to his curate with mild but firm remonstrance. A long conversation resulted in Mr. Benshaw's grave announcement—that it certainly *would* be better if he could obtain some rustic curacy where living was cheaper and tongues fewer. The incumbent promised his aid to this end. Oddly enough, nothing whatever had been done in Donniston towards providing Mr. Benshaw with a benefice. *He* was the same as ever, but his admirers had grown languid.

The new curacy was found; the Benshaws prepared for another migration. Then on a day Mrs. Batt came to Mrs. Benshaw with a singular proposal:

would the parents allow little Amy to remain with Mrs. Batt, to be cared for with all motherly kindness? Of course, she might at any time return, but for the present—until things looked brighter?

‘Excellent woman!’ remarked the curate that evening. ‘Who could have looked for such generous thoughtfulness? I am sure dear Amy will be quite as happy as dear Harriet.’

There was some little unpleasantness in Donniston before the Benshaws’ departure: one or two ill-conditioned shopkeepers said and did nasty things. But Mr. Benshaw received another testimonial—this time a silver coffee-pot. It helped to pay for the removal.

THE TOUT OF YARMOUTH BRIDGE

TECHNICALLY speaking, Mrs. Bloggs was full ; that is to say, she had packed her house with twice as many lodgers as a regard for health or comfort would have permitted her to receive. For a holiday refuge, it had no striking advantages ; from the windows nothing was visible but a street precisely resembling those of poorer Kennington, and the beach was half a mile away. Mrs. Bloggs owed something of this prosperity to her niece, a girl only twelve years old, but rich in the peculiar gifts which go to make a perfect landlady. When a vacancy occurred, Serena—that was the girl's happy name—strolled down to Yarmouth Bridge, and met the swarm of people constantly pouring forth from the railway station. She had washed her face, and put on an attractive little pinafore, so that homely people in quest of lodgings readily gave ear to Serena's invitation. At other times Serena assisted her aunt in keeping the house dirty, in pilfering the lodgers' groceries, and spoiling food given to be cooked. Her infancy had been passed in Camden Town,

which was also Mrs. Bloggs's original abode. Achieving independence at the age of nine, she consulted health, pleasure, and profit by taking a London engagement (as 'general') for the gloomy months, and, in the season of light and joy, transferring herself to her relative's at Yarmouth. But Serena was not wholly satisfied with the terms granted her by Mrs. Bloggs; she desired a larger commission for her work as tout, and an increased stipend in her quality of domestic help. Overtures from a certain Mrs. Kipper, in the next street, had much unsettled her mind. This morning, while frying bacon in the pan which had just been used for bloaters, she mused wistfully. Of a sudden, Mrs. Bloggs rushed into the kitchen, and began to talk in a voice of suppressed excitement.

'There! That child's got scarlet fever! They wouldn't believe me at first, but I know it *is*. Take their breakfast up; they're going by the eleven o'clock. I've let them off with half the week if they'd go at once and not have no doctor here. I *knew* that child was going to have something soon as I set eyes on it. The idea of coming into people's 'ouses! They'd ought to be ashamed of themselves! You just hold your tongue, and take up their breakfast.'

The people in question, Londoners, with two babies, occupied a couple of rooms at the top of the house; it was only the third day since their arrival. The sick child had cried more or less all nig'

With the utmost despatch and secrecy, Mrs. Bloggs got rid of these dangerous inmates, who travelled back to London in a crowded third-class carriage. As soon as they were out of the house, Serena made ready to go down to the Bridge. It was high-season ; rooms priced at twenty-five shillings a week must not stand vacant.

As usual, the girl had good luck. After only one or two futile attempts she accosted a decent-looking couple with a little boy, and found them willing to accompany her.

‘You won’t get better rooms in all Yarmouth, mum. Clean? The people as had them left early yesterday, and I’ve given them a thorough scrub out with my own hands. They was that sorry to leave us—and after three weeks, too! My aunt can’t do too much to make her lodgers comfortable. From Colchester, mum? Why, I’ve got a sister there in service, and she says she don’t think she’ll ever leave—she likes the place so much!’

The man, who carried a small portmanteau, seemed to be some species of clerk ; he had a bloodless face and a tired, anxious expression. His wife, laden with bags and parcels, talked incessantly, and with a half-hysterical laugh, as if the prospect of holiday were too much for her nerves. The little boy jumped about and shouted his joy at the novel scene. It took them some twenty minutes to reach Mrs. Bloggs’s, and they were so tired after the walk

that even a worse lodging would have been a welcome place of rest. Save the unavoidable change of water and linen, and a sprinkling under the beds of what she called 'disinfectin', Mrs. Bloggs had left the top rooms just as they were when the Londoners departed an hour or two ago. She received the newcomers with effusive welcome, delighted that they had not arrived ten minutes sooner, when she was concluding a violent dispute with her lodgers on the first floor. What did they think of *these* rooms? Didn't they smell sweet and fresh? The lady must excuse her if she asked where they came from; she did like to know something of people, as she tried to keep her house thoroughly respectable. And the very least she could take was twenty-seven shillings—which included first-rate cooking. Twenty-five? Oh, dear me! Did they think this was one of the *ordinary* lodging-houses? And so on for a long time, until the man wearily consented to pay twenty-six shillings—an extravagance of which his wife continued to talk petulantly until she closed her eyes at eleven o'clock that night.

Serena, meanwhile, had come to a momentous resolve. She was afraid of scarlet fever; this very day she would quit her aunt's house and go over to Mrs. Kipper's. But, first of all, she must secure the money due to her. When Mrs. Bloggs came down from settling her new lodgers, Serena, arms akimbo in the kitchen, put a plain question:

‘And what are you going to give me for holding my tongue?’

Mrs. Bloggs was startled. Well, she would give eighteenpence instead of the usual shilling commission.

‘Oh, you will! Then you may as well pay my wages at the same time, and make it a ’arf-a-sovereign. See!’

The girl grinned, and planted her foot firmly. The week’s wages just due to her amounted to three-and-sixpence—monstrous for a child of twelve, her aunt was always saying; but Serena knew her own value, and the present opportunity was not to be neglected. She would have half-a-sovereign down, or tell the new lodgers what had happened this morning. Mrs. Bloggs cursed her niece, but durst not defy her. As soon as she had received the money, Serena, on pretence of putting it away, went into the wash-house (where she slept), made a bundle of her very few belongings, and straightway fled.

It was a disaster such as Mrs. Bloggs had not suffered for a long time. When she grasped the situation—in an hour or two she knew from a neighbour that Serena had gone to Mrs. Kipper’s—her wrath overcame all prudence. Leaving house and lodgers to look after themselves, she rushed round into the next street, burst upon Mrs. Kipper’s like a storm, and assailed that shrewd woman, as well as

Serena, who stood by, with virulent abuse. Fury had made her forgetful of the weapon in her niece's hand, and Serena, amused at the conflict between the two women, took good care not to retaliate on Mrs. Bloggs by a disclosure of that morning's sinister event; for all she knew, Mrs. Kipper, at the very name of scarlet fever, might turn her out of doors. But when her aunt began to make charges of theft, to damage her character in her new mistress's eyes, the girl had much ado to restrain herself; secretly she resolved to be 'even' with Mrs. Bloggs by a stratagem that would not imperil her own position.

The next day, after a morning on the dry sands (trampled and befouled for a month past by an innumerable multitude), amid the yells of ruffian peddlers, the roaring of blackguard vocalists, the boisterous mirth of an East-End mob transported to the sea-shore, Mrs. Bloggs's new lodgers were returning to dinner, when, in a bye-street, the wife and mother felt her arm touched; she looked round, and recognised Serena, who begged her to step aside for a moment's conversation.

'I think it only right to tell you, mum,' said the girl, 'that the lodgers as was before you in your rooms had the scarlet fever. I didn't know it till after, or I'd never have took you there. They was got away on the quiet. It was a child as had it, and if I was you——'

The woman uttered a scream, which checked her

husband, and in the confusion Serena ran away. There was a rapid, high-voiced colloquy, which ended in the man's hastening forward. Already he felt discontented with Mrs. Bloggs's lodgings, and fear for his child roused him to active indignation. The scene that followed Mrs. Bloggs would not soon forget. Met with a flat and furious denial of what he had heard, the man made such a disturbance that all the other lodgers, just home to dinner, came out of their rooms, and to them he addressed questions.

Yes—replied a voice—it was quite true that a family had left after staying only a day or two, and that they had a sickly, crying child. When did they leave? Why an hour or so before their successors' arrival.

'Then *there's* a damned lie brought home to you at once!' shouted the man. 'Look here, all you people, there's been scarlet fever in the house. Take my advice, and do what we're going to do—clear out, and don't pay a farthing. If she tries to stop you, get a p'liceman!'

The shrill tones of his wife supplied detail to all who asked it; confusion grew worse confounded; though a burly woman (who, ere now, had retained lodgers by force), Mrs. Bloggs retreated downstairs into her kitchen, and there listened to the storm of vilification which laid bare all her misdoings and the discomforts of the house. Panic, aided by the spirit

of dishonesty, emptied her lodgings in about half an hour. She did not dare to make her wrongs public, being already unfavourably known to the police, but against Serena she registered a deep and fearful vow.

That promising damsel, however, finding, on brief trial, that Mrs. Kipper exacted too much work, had already quitted Yarmouth for Lowestoft. Like all persons of genius, she abhorred monotony.

A WELL-MEANING MAN

THE advertisement evoked only three replies ; perhaps it was less carefully worded than in former instances. However, one of the letters had a very encouraging sound. Youth of nineteen ; till of late, clerk to his father ; father just dead ; small sum at disposal ; willing to pay reasonable premium, but salary looked for. 'Yours obediently, Robert H. Winter.' The others read more doubtfully ; it would be as well to see Robert Winter before replying to them.

Mr. Parrington (that was his name for the present) sat in the small office which he had taken, furnished, a month or two ago. Sales and purchases of every kind of property, valuation, surveying, recovery of debts—all such undertakings fell within his scope ; to him, nothing human was alien for which a commission could be charged. A thoroughly well-meaning man ; no one more resolute to live honestly, if only the world would let him. But, for some ten years, the world had seemed intent on making him a rogue. Innumerable his fresh starts, his new leaves turned over with a virtuous thrill. He

had been driven, by sheer force of circumstance, out of every large town in England ; he had tried rural districts, with no better result, and the marvel was, that once only had the law laid a finger on him. A mere touch, as good as forgotten, yet it had helped to embitter Mr. Parrington. Why, think merely of his prodigious exertions in the borrowing of small sums ! And now, at last, every effort of that kind had failed ; what could he do but advertise again—for such a young man as Robert Winter ?

The young man came at the appointed time, with absolute punctuality. At the sight of the office he seemed a trifle disappointed, but Mr. Parrington was prepared for this, and combated the unfavourable impression with his blindest smile, his most cordial tone. He liked the look of young Winter ; the pallid, amiable countenance, air of nervous conscientiousness ; the mourning-band on his coat-sleeve and silk hat.

‘ Well, Mr. Winter, let us talk it over. This, by-the-bye, is a temporary office. Just now I do a good deal of my work at home. Well, and what exactly has your experience been ? I see, I see. All very useful, but—*hardly*—never mind ! Suppose I put a practical test. Here is a catalogue of the last sale at Brooks and Roper’s, marked with prices obtained. Suppose you sit down and work out for me—first, the *average* of items on the first page ; then, a *commission* at $7\frac{1}{2}$ on the three highest figures.’

With a tremulousness he could not conceal, the young man applied himself to the task ; Mr. Parrington, the while, turned to the writing of letters in which he had been interrupted.

‘Done already? Very good time, indeed, Mr. Winter—and perfectly correct. Come, I think we can make something of you.’

Mr. Winter flushed with satisfaction. Ten minutes more talk settled the whole affair. In consideration of a premium of five-and-twenty pounds Mr. Parrington would instruct his young friend in the art and mystery of commission-agency, and, moreover, would give him a salary of fifteen shillings a week, to be increased to twenty in six months’ time. Payment of premium to-morrow morning, when duties would begin. And Mr. Winter took a friendly leave, without its ever having occurred to him to request any proof of Mr. Parrington’s respectability. At half-past nine next morning the premium was paid. In exchange for it, Mr. Winter received a very solemnly worded and skilfully engrossed document, which he put into his pocket.

‘And now to business, Mr. Winter. Here is a catalogue of a sale at Snape’s, Rose Alley, London Wall ; you’ll easily find it. You will attend the sale (10.30 for 11), and mark all the prices with great care. It’ll probably be over by one o’clock. Then you will lunch—let me beg of you not to take alcoholic liquor—and be here at a quarter to two

sharp. By-the-bye, as you pass Lukin Brothers'—ah! you must 'study the Directory in your spare time—just look in, with my compliments, and get their latest prices-current. You understand? Their *latest*.'

A week passed. Mr. Winter had been pretty fully occupied, almost always away from the office; it seemed to him that he was learning a good deal about public auctions, and his knowledge of the City of London had decidedly improved. On the morning of the day when his first week's salary fell due, he received at his lodgings a post-card from Mr. Parrington—'Meet me 10.15, booking-office King's Cross main station.' He kept the appointment, only to find Mr. Parrington in such a hurry that hardly a dozen words could be exchanged.

'Back to-morrow morning. Here's a list of matters you'll look after. Oh, by-the-bye, I'm in your debt. Hang it! No change. Settle to-morrow. Office, usual time.'

Robert Winter did not feel well this morning. Not long ago he had had an attack of influenza, and his present symptoms disagreeably suggested a return of the complaint. After struggling painfully through the work Mr. Parrington had set him (it was a cold, drizzly day), he went home, and to bed. Yes, the fever was upon him again. In his poor lodgings he passed a miserable night.

Till of late his home had been at Rochester. Al

his father's death, armed with a capital of thirty pounds, all he could hope for, he came up to London, and was lucky enough to see Mr. Parrington's advertisement. Of course, he must struggle against this slight illness. But in the morning he could not stand, much less prepare to go to the office. With difficulty he found a messenger to take a letter for him.

Now, as it happened, Mr. Parrington's sudden departure was on no make-believe business. When writing to his clerk he had purposed a mere trick to postpone payment of salary ; as yet he was not quite ready to 'turn over a new leaf.' But that evening his eyes fell on a newspaper advertisement which startled him. It was headed with his name, his true name, and stated that, on applying to such and such persons in a Midland town he would 'hear of something to his advantage.' Of a possible *something* he had long been aware, and his heart leapt at the prospect of what he hardly durst hope. So it came to pass that, when his clerk met him at King's Cross, Mr. Parrington was actually speeding away on an affair of moment. It proved to be the event of his tremulous anticipation, and when, twenty-four hours later, he returned to London, it was as the jubilant possessor of a considerable sum of money ; no fortune but quite enough either to support him for a few years in cosy idleness, or—as he fervently resolved—

to give him the genuine 'start in life' which he had so long sighed for.

In the letter-box at the office he found Robert Winter's excuse for absence : he read it thoughtfully.

'Poor devil! He looked run-down from the first. A good lad, too. I'll go and see him, and—yes, by God! he shall have his money back. He shall! I can afford the luxury of being honest, and I will.'

Mr. Parrington, to fortify himself for this great undertaking, repaired to a restaurant in Cheapside and lunched copiously. Over his subsequent cigar he mused :

'After all, why should I go and see the poor chap? Ten to one I should only make him ashamed : no doubt, he's lodging in some damned poor hole. I'll write and send him his week's salary, and tell him to meet me somewhere or other when he's on his legs again. Yes, that's better.'

In the glow of his bottle of wine, Mr. Parrington did write, and, what was more, enclosed a postal order for fifteen shillings. 'As soon as you are all right, send me a card to the General Post Office, and I'll tell you where to meet me. Certain circumstances have made it necessary for me to alter arrangements, but *you will be treated honourably.*'

Robert Winter's post-card lay at the General Post Office for a long time. Meanwhile Mr. Parrington—no longer so named—had quitted London.

After all (such was the upshot of his musing), the foolish lad, if he got his twenty-five pounds back again would only lose it to some designing rascal ; far better that he should exert himself and get a clerkship in the ordinary way, and earn honest wages—far better. Mr. Parrington, as always, meant well, and, in days to come, he remembered with vast self-approval that he *had* sent the week's salary to the poor devil laid up with illness.

A SONG OF SIXPENCE

THE window of a little stationer's shop, far away in North-East London, exhibited not long ago the following advertisement, written in an old-fashioned female hand, on half a sheet of note-paper :

*Lessons on the Pianoforte, also in Singing, given by a
Professional Lady. Sixpence an hour. Apply within.*

It befel, from time to time, that persons did make application, with the result that they were requested to walk into the parlour behind the shop, where the 'professional lady' gave them audience. Her name was Miss Withers, her age not more than forty, and she had lost one of her legs. Though in such very humble circumstances, and constrained by poverty to welcome every one who would engage and pay her to 'teach music,' Miss Withers had anything but a meek countenance or a naturally subservient manner. Twenty years ago she must have been rather a handsome young woman. Her profile was still good, but premature wrinkles and the wasting of flesh, together with a something which expressed itself in close-shut lips and brows bent over bright though myopic eyes, gave her an aspect not generally found

attractive. In speech she was brief, not seldom curt ; and her accent, if not that of an educated person, betrayed superiority to those among whom she lived. When the parent of a new pupil sought her out, she would eye him, or her, with keen inspection, and regulate her remarks accordingly. As may be presumed, it rarely happened that she had to deal with people of any intelligence, but stupidity and ignorance have their degrees. Occasionally Miss Withers made a mistake. Perchance she had undertaken to teach a little girl whose parents seemed to her endowed with some measure of reason. She would begin with notes and scales, and so on. At the third lesson, the mother (who had been listening outside the door) would come in with dissatisfied look.

‘ ‘Arriet don’t seem to be gettin’ on very much. When are you goin’ to teach her a toon, Miss Withers ? Her father says that kind o’ plyin’ mikes his ’ead ache.’

‘ She shall begin tunes at once,’ was the teacher’s short reply. And forthwith, dropping all methodic instruction, she trained the child (as though some docile animal) to hammer out a familiar melody. The parents applauded, and were willing to recommend Miss Withers to their friends.

Of course, it was not merely by stress of misfortune that Miss Withers had fallen so low. Character is fate, but of necessity we attribute to

mortals a share in the shaping of their own ends. This woman had enjoyed some advantages in early life ; her mother was a professional singer, her father the proprietor of a panorama ; up to the age of ten, she had fairly good schooling and something more than ordinary instruction in music, this seeming to be her strong point. But at that time her mother died, and for the next ten years her father's history was a process of degradation, mainly due to drink. The only child, she did what in her lay to answer her father's hopes ; no harshness embittered her young life, and only when she found herself alone in the world did she become entirely dependent on her own exertions.

It need not have been difficult for her to earn a living, whether as singer, instrumentalist, or teacher ; but Miss Withers suffered from an overweening sense of her powers and importance ; she fretted in a state of subordination, and came to grief by taking what seemed a short cut to independence. Scorning the lower walks of the vocalist's profession, she had attached herself to a provincial concert company, and was living in moderate comfort, when the wealthy son of a wealthier father (commercial folk) made her acquaintance, and offered her marriage. The splendid prospect proved too much for her, and certain indiscretions—nothing worse—led first to the postponement, then to the final defeat of her hopes. Unhappily for the girl, her quondam lover offered

pecuniary compensation, thus suggesting a step she would probably not have taken if left to her mere chagrin. She consulted a speculative solicitor, and brought an action for breach of promise, in which she was awarded five hundred pounds.

A fatal success. To begin with, the publicity of the case had nourished all the worst elements of her character : vulgar flattery debased her ambitions, and the week's notoriety ruined her self-respect. As often happens at such a juncture, she received offers of marriage by the score. Feeling that the future was in any case assured, she lived for some months in luxury and waste, and was surrounded by precisely the people it would have been well for her to avoid. When her means ran low, she surveyed the list of possible husbands—now diminished. The proprietor of a hotel ultimately won and wedded her. He, as it happened, was on the point of bankruptcy, and in a year's time the ambitious woman had no choice but to work as manageress in a much smaller establishment, to which with difficulty they had got appointed.

Followed gloom, decline, and squalor. Her husband drank ; she did likewise. In a quarrel one night, she was thrown down the stairs, and so badly injured that one of her legs had to be amputated. The allowance she extorted from her husband was poor consolation, and in wretched solitude, unable to appear as a musician, knowing that her voice had

failed, she naturally betook herself to the bottle. At nine-and-twenty, when widowhood brought a new event into the life of sordid monotony, she had neither health nor prospects. Her childless condition might, or might not, have aided the downfall which she herself was accustomed to contemplate with a bitter defiance.

Strange to say, the fear of destitution did her good. She was not so far degraded as to let herself sink into the slough of mendicancy, and she shrank in horror from the workhouse. Still possessed of some self-control, she changed her locality, changed her name, and began a struggle for existence as a music-teacher. Help from old acquaintances was out of the question ; she must subsist, if at all, on the patronage of the lowest class that paid for music-lessons, people who made no inquiries, and were satisfied or not on their own judgment of results. Years had gone by, and Miss Withers—it was not even her own maiden name—kept body and soul together. Of her petty earnings, she spent more in liquid than in solid sustenance, but, by whatever grace, could not be called a drunkard ; most people with whom she came in contact suspected her of nothing worse than semi-starvation.

After many changes of abode, she was fortunately settled with a family in some slight degree civilised ; people who gave her a garret, the use of the parlour with its piano, and occasional food, in return for five

shillings a week and music-lessons to three girls. These pupils were almost the only ones whom Miss Withers had permission to teach properly. Her six-penny hours brought her in daily contact with strange forms of vanity and doltishness. Sometimes the pupil had no piano at home, and must be taught in the parlour behind the shop ; but, as a rule, the desire for lessons came as the result of possessing an instrument, which had been procured merely for exhibition. The newly-wedded wife would dispense with anything rather than with a piano. Miss Withers gave her lessons in singular places : in garrets above, and cellars below ; bed-sitting-rooms, kitchen-sitting-rooms, bed-kitchen-sitting-rooms, over stables, at the rear of rag-and-bottle shops, amid filth, stench, every shape of brutal uncleanness. And, by very scorn of the people whose imbecility supported her, she was saved from some of her own vices.

‘Oh, the fools! Oh, the mean, dirty fools! Thus did she mutter to herself, day after day, in going from lesson to lesson.

‘A tune?’ she once exclaimed to a fat woman clad in silk, who grumbled that her all but idiot child could ‘ply’ nothing after the second hour; ‘what tune shall I teach her? Will “Sing a Song of Sixpence” do?’

The fat woman had no sense of irony, and said *that* would be better than nothing.

A PROFITABLE WEAKNESS

ONLY to the few and the very fortunate of men is it granted to earn a livelihood by the exertion of their best powers. Men in general owe sustenance to the meaner of their faculties, often enough to the basest possibility that is in them ; and, even so, find the effort no light one. As a singular instance of something between the two, of a man who found his profit in the cultivation of a mere amiable weakness, without fatigue, and without sense of degradation, take Lambert Wellaway.

At the age of five-and-twenty he was a master in a boarding-school, and loathed his calling. Possibly, under very favourable circumstances, he might have made a good teacher ; he had a vein of studious inclination, a faculty for the lucid exposition of his knowledge, a pleasant manner, an alluring sportiveness of intellect ; but, in the school, these gifts were wasted. The large, noisy classes made his head ache ; average brainless boyhood was a horror to him ; he had not the least power of discipline, and was wont to declare in bitterness that his post demanded the qualities, not of a teacher, but of a drill-sergeant. Yet, how other-

wise support himself? Of course, he had thought of literature—who has not? But Lambert Wellaway did not overrate his endowment; he was wise enough to judge of his chances as an author by the inertia that opposed him whenever he sat down to write. Indolence had a great part in his temperament; a book, a sunny corner, and entire tranquillity, formed his ideal of supportable existence. When the inevitable came to pass, and his headmaster suggested to him that their engagement was for the advantage of neither, Wellaway could feel nothing but relief. He went away to his people in the country, and mused on things in general, as he idled about the fields.

His walk one day led him by a stream-side path, along a leafy little valley, and here he came upon a middle-aged man, who was painting a picture—a serious picture in oils, a large canvas, the artist very business-like in his costume and attitude. Much interested, but afraid to linger, Wellaway threw a glance at the work, and passed on. He noticed, however, that the artist gave him a very friendly look, and so, on his return in half-an-hour's time, he slackened pace as he drew near again, viewing the canvas more boldly than before. A civil greeting rose to the lips of both men: Wellaway halted.

‘How very beautiful! Pray allow me to watch your work for a moment.’

He spoke with perfect sincerity, honestly admiring

the picture, and delighted at the opportunity of conversing with a genuine painter. It surprised him when he saw the face of the middle-aged man flush with boyish gratification.

‘You like it? Really? I’m very glad. I—I rather thought that I had—had got the effect. Very difficult, this *plein air* work. The water just there—yes, under the willow—doesn’t quite satisfy me.’

The artist had a very deep yet soft voice, and spoke nervously. His utterance was not altogether that of an educated man, and his lack of self-possession, a certain uncouthness in his bearing, excited Wellaway’s wonder. Young, inexperienced, fastidious, he had imagined that an artist must of necessity be distinguished by every kind of refinement. The longer they talked, the more plainly it appeared that the painter had no very bright intelligence, and that he was very defective in grace of manner. But Wellaway’s interest seemed to flatter him profoundly; he showed an eagerness to detain the young man, to strike up a friendship with him. He mentioned that he was staying, alone, at a little inn not far away, and:

‘If you’re living about here, you might look me up—if you have time in the evening. I should like to show you some little things I have with me—trifles—water-colours. My name is Paddy, but’—he laughed—‘I’m not an Irishman. Perhaps one of my ancestors was; I don’t know.’

Wellaway gladly promised to call that very evening, and kept his word. He found Mr. Paddy sitting in the inn's best room, with cigars and strong waters on the table. The artist received him with almost excessive cordiality ; they were soon talking like old acquaintances. When Mr. Paddy opened a portfolio, Wellaway tried to examine the sketches and finished water-colours with a critical eye ; for already he suspected that the painting he had liked so much at the first glance was not, in truth, of great artistic value. All unskilled in the matter, he now felt his doubts irresistibly confirmed ; these small things seemed to him decidedly commonplace. Another might have suffered embarrassment ; not so Wellaway. To speak smoothly, pleasingly, was in his very nature ; not only did he shrink from giving pain, in such a case as this, by silence or scanty applause, but it positively gratified him to be the cause of gratification.

‘ Delightful ! A charming little thing that. How wonderfully you have got the sky ! Yes, that’s one of the best ; a really exquisite thing ! ’

Mr. Paddy drank in the praise as though at every pore ; his eyes danced with joy ; an infantile slobbering appeared at the corners of his mouth ; he fidgeted hither and thither, his hands tremulous in sheer delight. All the time, he kept swallowing great draughts of whisky-and-water, and a gentle rubescence tinged the end of his soft unshapely nose.

They exchanged confidences. Having spok

frankly of his own affairs, Wellaway learnt that his friend was no artist by profession, but a retired man of business, who from youth upwards had conceived himself born to be a painter. Mr. Paddy had a small estate in a delightful part of Gloucestershire; was married, but childless. In the summer-time he wandered extensively, with elaborate apparatus; his aim was to make a gallery of English landscape.

'I don't exhibit. To tell the truth, I don't think it quite fair to the men who have to sell pictures. I *do* sell, now and then, privately, but always for some charitable purpose—something of that kind, you know. I tell you what it is, you must come over to my place and spend a day or two—a week or two. Now, will you? I mean it—do, indeed!'

Why not? Wellaway accepted the invitation, and, in a week's time, he arrived as a guest at Mr. Paddy's house. Here another surprise awaited him. Mrs. Paddy was not at all the sort of person he had imagined. At least ten years younger than her husband, handsome, good-naturedly supercilious, this lady seemed to lead a perfectly independent life, and to take no interest whatever in the doings of her spouse. When Wellaway spoke to her of Mr. Paddy's paintings, she smiled, uttered an 'Ah—yes,' and changed the subject. Of actual disagreement between them there was no sign; they went their several ways with complete decorum, neither seeming to desire anything else.

Having come for a week, Lambert Wellaway remained Mr. Paddy's guest for nine years.

Both would have been astonished had any one hinted to them that the situation was other than honourable. Wellaway called himself a 'secretary,' and saw no reason to doubt that his services merited their reward; in truth, the one and only service he rendered to his patron was that of unwearying flattery. For this Mr. Paddy had languished: in Wellaway he found a priceless stimulant, which soon became a necessity of life. His artistic hobby had yielded him but a doubtful, troublous satisfaction, yet he could not abandon it. Though more than moderately obtuse, he had learnt that his acquaintances considered him a bore of the first magnitude: he was ever seeking for new friends who would admire his pictures, receive them as presents, and, chief point, hang them conspicuously in their houses. In the nature of things it grew more and more difficult to satisfy this craving for admiration, since, however vain, Mr. Paddy stood upon his social dignity, and the praise of boors had little savour for him. Such a man as Wellaway, educated, well-bred, who could practise adulation without a trace of vulgar obsequiousness, appealed to his very heart. And Wellaway himself never found the position burdensome, owing to those happy characteristics of his, the inability to tell a disagreeable truth, and the pleasure he took in pleasing. He deemed himself a favourite of fortune.

At thought of the past, he shuddered ; forward he never desired to look. He lived in a luxurious home, associated with agreeable persons, travelled amid the pleasantest scenes. It had come about insensibly by repeated prolongation of his visit ; perhaps he could hardly have said at what moment he changed his quality of guest for that of permanent inmate. Really, an ideal state of things.

Then Mr. Paddy died, and his testament bequeathed to Mr. Wellaway a very comfortable little income. Mrs. Paddy, having a separate estate, took the matter quite reasonably and with much good-nature.

THE BEGGAR'S NURSE

MRS. HINTON, a lady in happy circumstances, with the obedience of her husband and the admiration of many friends, received one morning a letter which greatly shocked her. The tenor of the first line or two prompted her to turn to the signature, which was simply 'Adeline.' Mrs. Hinton had known but one Adeline—a close friend of her girlhood, now lost to sight and inquiry for some ten years ; she it was who wrote, who told of sickness, destitution, despair, and besought the help that could hardly have been refused to a stranger.

The same day they met. As a representative of society, Mrs. Hinton had something to forgive ; as a woman with a heart, she disregarded all but Adeline's necessities. The sufferer was tended, solaced, and, as her strength allowed or occasion offered, she made known the course of her obscure life to this sympathetic hearer. The story ended, as it had begun, with the statement that, for more than a twelvemonth, she had acted as nurse in a country infirmary.

'I remember,' said Mrs. Hinton, 'that you often

spoke of nursing—thought you would like it. Did it prove too much for your strength?’

Adeline shuddered, looked away, seemed unable to talk of this experience. But at length she forced herself to do so. In a low, unsteady voice, she gave answer :

‘It not only ruined my health—it made me a devil.’

The lady of delicate sensibilities was startled, and frowned a little.

‘Ah, you don’t understand,’ pursued the other ; ‘you can’t. Before that, I was never *bad*. Believe it or not, I kept the purity of my heart. You used to think me too sensitive, too compassionate ; I was still the same when I began my work in the infirmary. When I left it, I was base and cruel—everything that my true self had always loathed. I think—I hope—that bodily weakness was the chief cause of it. But I know now how women, not originally bad, grow corrupt in soul. I know what is meant by moral poison.’

Adeline’s age was about five-and-thirty. Her voice had not much changed since Mrs. Hinton knew it in gardens and drawing-rooms ; but her features—the eyes, the mouth—were hard to reconcile with memory.

‘Yes, when I undertook that work I thought it was not only a means of support, but a privilege—a way of recovering my self-respect, and more than

that. At first I welcomed every hardship all the things—how could I describe them?—that I had to break myself into enduring. I had no experience of nursing, and no one expected me to have. They doubted whether I was fit for the post, but only because I didn't seem strong enough, and, as I afterwards understood, coarse enough. Paupers can be looked after by any one who will undertake it. No knowledge, no training—at least, it was so in *that* workhouse.

'There were two of us nurses, only two. Often I have had forty patients to look after, and for twelve hours at a time. Ah! often for longer. I have sunk down and fallen asleep by dying people.

'But the toil wasn't the worst of it. That harmed only my body.'

'I don't understand you,' remarked the listener. 'Do you mean that you had such dreadful people to look after?'

'They were dreadful often; creatures your mind could never form an idea of; much more like animals than human beings. But I didn't mean that. To begin with, I suffered most from never having any privacy. I had no sleeping-room to myself; two servants shared it with me when I slept at night, and when I had my rest in the daytime the other nurse kept coming in and out for things that were kept there. Later, she did it just to me, I hated each other. She was tl

heartless, vile-minded woman. She got jealous of me for all sorts of reasons, and told horrible lies of me to the matron, and raged because she couldn't get me turned away. At last, whenever I saw her asleep, I used to wish to kill her. It was a sort of madness ; I used to go about saying to myself that it would be a good and right thing to kill her.

'She had been there a long time, and suffered from all sorts of ailments—the common ailments of overworked nurses. She was flat-footed, and had dreadful varicose veins, and—oh ! I can't tell you. The one before her died of consumption—worked almost to the day of her death.

'I used to pray for strength against my horrible thoughts and passions. I prayed silently as I walked about. And I exhausted myself with conscientious nursing, because I thought it was Christian work and would keep my heart pure. That other woman took her duties as carelessly as she could. Poor agonising wretches would cry to her by the hour, and she wouldn't heed them—either because she hated them for the trouble they gave, or because it was cold and she wanted to sit by the fire.

'The worst was when I found that my own heart was hardening against the patients. At first, I pitied them, shed tears by the bedside ; but that lasted only a short time. For one thing, to nurse them properly is impossible ; no one could have done it. The w knew that well enough, and when I spoke of

it to him he shrugged his shoulders. He used to sing to himself some lines—I don't know where they come from—"Rattle his bones over the stones, he's only a pauper whom nobody owns." And I got into the way of doing the same, though I loathed myself for it.'

Mrs. Hinton interposed.

'Oh ! but surely this kind of thing doesn't go on in *our* day ?'

'Not everywhere, of course not ; but in a good many of those out-of-the-way places. I heard stories of some that were worse than ours. I am quite sure the workhouse patients are sometimes killed by nurses—killed by neglect and ill-usage, if not in more violent ways. And I tell you that I can understand it.'

Her voice quivered ; a dreadful light gleamed in her eyes.

'You see, I could never enjoy food ; what I swallowed there in the ward, or in some other hateful place, seemed to poison my blood. I saw everything with diseased vision. The whole world seemed to me—you remember that passage of Milton, about the "lazar-house" ? That was one of the words that haunted me—lazar-house. It was the true word, you know—the house of Lazarus, the sick beggar. And all the world seemed no better. I really forgot what the outside world was like, and my heart grew full of evil passions. I—I—can you believe it ?—I got, at last, so far that I *tortured* the patients who gave me

most trouble. I purposely neglected their wants, like the other woman. I took away the cup before they had drunk enough, and had a dreadful pleasure in their complaining or their abuse. No, I am not worse than other people. I believe there is not a woman living who wouldn't fall to that in such a position—not one—not one !'

Mrs. Hinton said musingly :

'I know what it is to be *impatient* with sick people.'

'Yes, and one must be more than human, one must be a saint, to nurse professionally and keep one's tender heart. I believe it is so under the best circumstances. In such places as *that*, it is the school for devils. I will never speak of it again, and pray to lose the memory of it.'

'Did you leave of your own accord ?'

'Yes, thank heaven ! In a moment when strength was granted me. Rather death by starvation.'

Mrs. Hinton, after reflecting, said quietly :

'I know a girl who is consumed with a sentimental desire for hospital-nursing. I shall speak to her mother.'

TRANSPLANTED

THE cab was piled with luggage, and within sat a young matron, her cheeks fresh as the meadows she had quitted but a few hours ago. Long Bill, lurking on the limits of the railway station, caught a significant nod from the cabdriver, and at once started in pursuit.

Long Bill was not very tall, but had limbs so excessively slender, and so meagre a trunk, that his acquaintances naturally thought of him in terms of length. When unoccupied, which was generally the case, he let his arms hang straight, and close to his sides, as though trying to occupy as little room in the world as possible. He walked on his toes, rather quickly, and almost without a bend of the knee; his back was straight, and the collar of his filthy coat always turned up, to shield the scraggy, collarless neck. Observe him in motion at a distance, and you were reminded of a red Indian on the trail. Catch sight of him suddenly close at hand, and his sliding, furtive carriage made you anxious about your pockets or watch-guard. By his own account, Bill was nineteen years old, but he had the wizened face of

senility : his hairless cheeks hollow over tooth-gaps, his nose mere cartilage, his small eyes a-blink, yet eager as those of a hungry animal.

For more than a mile he ran along by the laden cab, and seemingly without much effort : when it drew up in front of a comfortable house, Bill sprang to the door of the vehicle.

‘You’ll let a pore young feller help with the luggage, lydy ? I’ve ran all the w’y from Victoria.’

He panted his mendicant humility, and with a grimy paw shook drops from a scarce visible forehead. The fair young matron regarded him with pained, compassionate look.

‘You have *run* all the way from Victoria ? Certainly you may help ; of course you may !’

She alighted, entered the house, and stood there in the hall watching Long Bill as, with feverish energy, he assisted a servant to transfer trunks and parcels. Relatives pressed about the lady, but she could not give them due attention.

‘Look at that poor creature. He has followed my cab all the way from Victoria, just to earn a few pence ! Oh, these things are too dreadful !’

The simple heart of this lady was a law unto itself. She had possessions, and spoke with authority. In happy moment, Long Bill had pursued the wheels of her cab. Holding money in readiness, she talked with him. Could he not get work ? What was his story ? Where did he live ? To every question Bill

made fluent reply, panting oft, and squeezing the rag which served him for headgear. Work! Only give him the *chawnce*! See what it was to be rigidly honest: not since yesterday at this time had a morsel of bread passed his lips. Work! He threw up his eyes in appeal to powers supernal.

‘Come and see me to-morrow at twelve o’clock.’

His immediate wants provided for, Bill passed the evening in contemplation. He felt no prompting to impart to any one the wonder that had befallen. Very punctually next day did he present himself at the area-door of the comfortable house, and silently he was led to a room where the lady waited for him. To various searching questions he again answered with a tremulous candour which had its full effect. Then, bidding him listen and perpend, the lady offered her suggestion. Far away from London, in very beautiful country, she had a house, with gardens and fields, and there, if so it pleased him, William could support himself honourably by the labour of his hands—could learn the rural life, could gain health and strength, could forget the horrors of his early years. Was William disposed to consider this? The head-gardener, an estimable man, would direct and encourage him. He would receive wages, and eat the bread of independence. What said he?

William once more threw up his eyes, and, in very truth, knew not how to respond; but his face answered for him. Very well; he should have this

chance of proving his sincerity. In a day or two the arrangements would be complete. Let him come again, at a time appointed, and be in readiness to quit London. Meanwhile, he must purchase the decent clothes of a labouring man ; herewith, money for that purpose. Let him be faithful, and the sun of happiness would henceforth shine upon him.

In less than a week, behold Long Bill, answering now to the name of William Higgs, transplanted to quite a new sphere of existence. His lodging was in the cottage of a farm-labourer ; his duties led him to the kitchen-gardens of the manor-house, where Mr. Brown, grave and suspicious, set him primitive tasks with the fewest possible words. William looked as though he had fallen from the moon. He was vastly uncomfortable in his clean, new clothing ; he stared at everything and everybody ; he stood on guard against possible attacks, and kept wondering whether, if he climbed to the top of a hill not far away, he would be able to see London. The fact that he had travelled for three hours by an express train did not affect this speculation. Never in his life had William felt so hopeless, so purposeless.

By the directions of his benefactress, he was abundantly fed, and such advantage did he take of this novel experience that, on the second day, he began to suffer from an alarming disorder. A severe pain oppressed his breathing, and his heart throbbed

violently ; at length, utterly overcome, he lay gasping as if for life. A doctor had to be summoned. Soon there followed a second and no less violent attack ; William had secretly eaten two large cucumbers and a pound of cheese ; he paid the penalty. Work, from the first not only distasteful, but difficult, was for some days impossible.

Presently it appeared that he had caught a very bad cold ; he was threatened with congestion of the lungs. Writing to the lady of the manor, the doctor explained to her that William's constitution had suddenly broken down in consequence of the great and sudden change. There would have to be care ; figuratively and literally, this poor fellow had as good as no legs to stand upon ; he seemed ripe for all manner of diseases. If his diet and habits were not strictly regulated, the result might be lamentable.

A month went by. William had pretended to work, but always gave up on the plea of weakness ; he looked very miserable, and did not talk much ; his cough was bad. One day, after spitting on the gravel walk, he showed the gardener a red stain. Mr. Brown, though he did not like William, looked troubled.

‘ Ever seen that afore now ? ’

Ruefully and resentfully, the other declared that he had never known what it was to have anything the matter with him. Then he went apart into a

quiet spot, and lay on the grass, and was beset with terrors. Moreover, a great wrath awoke in him : he cursed the place and the people, and, above all, the well-meaning lady who had sent him into exile. Far-off London called to him with irresistible lure ; he longed for the streets, the noises, the smells, for his old companions, for the lurking-places of his homeless nights. Money he had none ; as yet his weekly wages only paid for board and lodging. But, with or without money, he would get back to London. His purpose must be secret ; if the enemy got wind of it, he would be forcibly detained.

That evening he contrived to make a stealthy entry into the grape-house, and to cut the roots of all the vines. Early the next morning he did the like damage to a number of rose-trees. A poor revenge, but it soothed him. Suspecting that his malfeasance among the vines must soon be discovered, he held himself in readiness for flight at any moment ; and while listening eagerly for every word spoken by the people about him, he sought new forms of mischief. His troublesome cough kept him in mind of the wrong he had suffered ; it urged him to malicious activity. But before he could do anything worse than pinch blossoms off certain valuable plants, the alarm struck upon his ear.

‘Hoy ! London Bill ! Mr. Brown wants you, and look sharp !’

It was one of the under-gardeners shouting from a distance. In sudden terror, in a mad desire for liberty and home, he slunk rapidly out of sight, then took to his heels.

In the night, at a village some twenty miles away, the constable came upon a tramp who lay helpless by the roadside. 'Severe hæmorrhage from the lungs,' said a doctor. And, but a few days later, William Higgs was again transplanted—this time to a yet more quiet locality, where no work would ever be asked of him.

A PARENT'S FEELINGS

MRS. SNICKERS boasted that she had buried five children, and brought up five more to the age of independence—which, in Boundary Lane, signifies the thirteenth year. Her youngest, a girl of nine, was being prepared for life's responsibilities at a neighbouring Board School. Never having spared the rod, Mrs. Snickers kept an easy conscience with regard to those of her offspring who gave trouble in the outer world. In Boundary Lane, the 'rod' was represented by a broom-handle, an old shoe, a rope-end, a fragment of firewood ; in flagrant cases, perchance by the poker. An impertinent doctor, abetted by an officious coroner, had on one occasion caused Mrs. Snickers much pain and inconvenience by remarks upon the death of a child whom she had seen fit to chasten rather severely. It was a ridiculous case, for the mother gave clear evidence that the little girl had been weakly from birth, so how could *she* be to blame if the child succumbed after a well-merited thrashing ? Sue, the latest born, had again and again endured much sterner correction ; was there not the broken bridge of her nose for evidence ? Mrs. Snickers

always *did* feel sorry about that broken nose, which prejudiced her daughter's chances in life ; but Sue had been 'that aggravatin',' and as Mrs. Snickers happened to have a cold flat-iron in her hand——

At nine years old, Sue Snickers began to resent the humiliating discipline of school. She by no means deemed herself a child, and was proudly conscious of having learnt many things in the school of life which no professed teacher would ever have imparted to her. She grew daily more impatient for the time of release. Mrs. Snickers, a widow, and forsaken by her other surviving children, looked to the time when Sue's earnings would help to support them both ; but the girl had views of her own, and was resolved that the last day of school should likewise be her last in the maternal lodging. London lay about her, with its infinite possibilities ; not hers the spirit that could be bounded by Boundary Lane. The long memories of ill-usage rankled in her mind. She hated her mother, and always spoke of her away from home by a very foul name. More than once, of late, she had threatened a suitable revenge for that injury to her face and her fortune. Mrs. Snickers, though still a sturdy woman, did not altogether like the gleam in Sue's eye when she felt it necessary to 'pay' the girl. Sue had discovered a rather effective mode of kicking. Her boots being worn out at the toes, she used the heel, and had even inserted nails in that part to make a more durable impression.

One of the school teachers was a young woman named Martin ; by nature kind, earnest, persevering, not exactly fond of her work in this roughest and vilest of London schools, but resolute to do her duty, and rewarded with a certain measure of success in subduing those children who were by any permitted method subduable. It was impossible for Miss Martin to look upon Sue Snickers as a hopeful subject ; she knew the girl to be corrupt, and a source of corruption ; the efforts of gentleness were to Sue a mere occasion of mockery, and stern treatment had just as little effect upon the child's indurated feelings. Knowing Sue to be a creature of hateful circumstances, the teacher made every allowance for her vicious and insubordinate habits. But it came to pass one day that Miss Martin lost patience, and, for discipline's sake, determined to make an example of Sue, who had behaved outrageously. The cane was brought forth, and Sue, not daring to resist, received one smart cut on each hand.

'Jist wait, that's all,' muttered Sue, when she had returned to her place, howling. 'Jist wait and see, that's all.' And, for the amusement of her neighbours, she exhausted a copious vocabulary in whispered abuse of Miss Martin.

Released at midday, the girl reached Boundary Lane in a few minutes.

'Mother ! Teacher 's been beatin' me fair cruel—sure as I stand 'ere—with the cane !' She howled

and writhed 'I ain't a-going to be licked by *her*. Jist look at my 'ands, they're fair blistered.'

Mrs. Snickers had just come from the public-house, where a misunderstanding with one of her neighbours in the Lane had occupied her for two or three hours. She was flushed, and in a state of nervous tension.

'Eh! What? Beatin' my child? You come along wi' me. I'll show the——.'

Hastening away, with volleys of furious and filthy invective, she encountered Mrs. Dubbin, the neighbour with whom she had been quarrelling. At once unkindness was forgotten.

'Ear what my Sue says? The teacher 's been thrashin' her that cruel she can't hardly stand. I'll show the——.'

In Mrs. Dubbin's eyes there straightway gleamed a sympathetic wrath.

Well! Did you ever! It's time this kind o' thing was put a stop to. I'll come along, an' back you up—s'elp me, I will. We'll show 'em! Think they're going' to wallop our children? Why, if the —— lays a 'and on one o' mine, I'll cut her —— liver out!'

With a triumphant yell, Sue ran behind the two women. Other children, scenting sport, turned eagerly back towards the school. As Mrs. Snickers and Mrs. Dubbin ran through the playground, they were accompanied and guided by an uproarious throng.

'Where is she? Let me get at her! Where's the — as thrashed my child, my Sue?'

Miss Martin was easily discovered; she stood in one of the school-rooms, talking with another teacher. 'That's her, mother!' shrieked Sue. 'Her with the dirty red 'ead!' Before the teachers could understand what was happening, Mrs. Snickers had rushed forward, had seized Miss Martin by the hair, and was avenging Sue with interest. 'I'll pay you, you red-'eaded —! I'll pay you! I'll teach you to lay your dirty 'and on a child o' mine, as has been brought up better than ever you was!' The children, led by Sue, shrieked their amusement and approval.

The second teacher had sped for help. She soon returned with the headmaster of the school, a stalwart man, not unused to scenes of this description. He, when he had gripped the yelling fury by the arms, found himself savagely attacked from the rear, his assailant Mrs. Dubbin. In a minute or two the blood was streaming down his cheeks; he had no choice but to fight the two women in earnest, flinging one to the ground, and making the second reel away with a back-hander on the face. When another male teacher came to his assistance, they succeeded, though with no little difficulty, in driving the women off the premises. Poor Miss Martin had been sadly mauled; she sat on the floor, sobbing hysterically. A handful of her hair lay not far off.

A day or two after, Mrs Snickers and Mrs

Dubbin appeared at the police-court, where, after a vigorous defence by counsel, who dwelt much upon the sacredness of parental feeling, each was fined the sum of five shillings and costs. In anticipation of this judgment, the money had already been subscribed by sympathetic parents in and about Boundary Lane. And that evening, when she came home very late from the public-house, Mrs. Snickers, merely to give vent to her emotions, dragged Sue out of bed and thrashed her unmercifully.

‘I’ll pay you, my lady! I’ll teach you to get your mother summonsed! I’ll——’

LORD DUNFIELD

FOR the first time in his life Lord Dunfield was suffering a bitter disappointment. Things had always gone very smoothly with him. As a boy—when his father was merely a wealthy commoner, absorbed in business and politics—he had known very little restraint; at Oxford, well supplied with money, he lived pretty much as nature bade him; and in his four-and-twentieth year came the complete independence which he had desired, but hardly ventured to hope for. His father's death was in the order of things; that of his elder brother, following in less than a twelvemonth, seemed to declare him fortune's favourite. The title, the vast possessions, were his; and in the same moment his eye fell upon a woman who, above all women he had ever known, answered to his ideal of a wife. Miss Filkins belonged to the wealthy middle-class; she was not over-educated, liked horses and dogs, and had no nonsense about her; her beauty, which was of the barmaid or burlesque-actress type, laid a spell upon the young nobleman. For a month or two he imagined **that he had only to ask and to receive.** When

he did ask, and the frank refusal made it clear that he had no hope, Lord Dunfield suddenly saw the world in a new light. His crude gaiety gave place to a bilious pessimism ; his coarse good-nature corrupted into brutal harshness ; the varnish of gentle breeding was rubbed away, and showed the cheap, rough fibre beneath. In a word, this young man became precisely what he would have been had he grown up in low station and amid unkindly circumstances.

It was most interesting to observe the revelation of natural blackguardism in one who had hitherto been raised above himself by the force of social example. That Lord Dunfield was born a blackguard no discerning person could doubt, yet there had seemed some likelihood of his making a decent show in the world's eye, especially if good luck attended him in the matter of marriage. It might well be that Miss Filkins was the woman marked for his suitable helpmate. Herself of all but the coarsest grain, she had thoroughly learnt the lesson of social prosperity, and could be trusted, while the sun still shone, never to deviate from the secure, the becoming path. But her inclination was to another man, whom, it was presently announced, she would marry at the end of the season. Lord Dunfield had but slight acquaintance with his rival, a middle-aged man of fashion, given indeed to gambling, but not otherwise worse than his neighbours. Cankered with jealous malignity, the noble youth cast :

means, not of preventing the marriage, for that he could not hope to do, but of instilling mutual suspicion into the minds of bride and bridegroom, so that they might soon come to hate each other with something more than common intensity. This would supply him with a pleasant subject of contemplation, and mitigate his sufferings at the time when they would otherwise be most acute.

While pondering this project, he was little seen in the society he had always frequented. After a week or so of ferocious retirement—during which he came near to killing a groom who displeased him, and only escaped legal penalties at a heavy cost—Lord Dunfield sought companionship where he would naturally have found it but for the accidents of his name and wealth ; in a world where he was quite unknown, among clerks and counter-jumpers, shop-girls and music-hall women, he awakened to a new sense of possible enjoyment. He had never been devoted to sport ; the loss of a good deal of money had already disgusted him with betting circles ; but here, in the thick of obscure London, a wonderfully congenial life offered him the resource he needed. He was himself surprised at the facility with which he made acquaintances, at the gusto with which he returned each evening to quarters of the town previously scarce known to him by name. Rowdyism in the purest form gave him keener pleasure than he had ever derived from its imitation at the West End.

He liked the atmosphere of disorderly public-houses ; it relieved him, as though from the burden of a lifetime, to yell and scuffle in back streets ; with great success he threw off the phrases and accents demanded by civilisation, and used the language of his associates like a native tongue. To fling coin about and excite envious admiration affected him with a more delightful sense of flattery than he had ever known. Lord Dunfield was in his element, and shone as never before.

Then came the day of Miss Filkins's marriage. Having been twitted on this subject by many of his old friends—to whom he had spoken of the lady with premature confidence—he resolved to be present at the ceremony. And not for this reason only. He wished to observe the countenance of the bridegroom—if possible, of the bride. With feminine assistance, Lord Dunfield had concocted and manufactured two anonymous letters : one addressed to Miss Filkins, containing information with regard to her future husband ; the other, for that gentleman's own perusal, professing to throw light on certain points of Miss Filkins's history and character. Each was a masterpiece of calumny, most ingeniously devised, and sure to cause temporary, if not permanent, trouble and discord. These letters were posted on the eve of the wedding-day, so as to exercise their effect in the morning hours **preceding** the ceremony.

The marriage was at a small but fashionable church in the Western district. Lord Dunfield, naturally not having received an invitation, sought one of his friends who had, and arranged to meet him at the door in time to get a good seat. People arrived in large numbers ; those who held cards all but sufficed to fill the church. In an unsubdued voice of sprightliness, Lord Dunfield gossiped with his friend. Nor was he singular in this ; a like animation, the same unrestrained freedom of talk, prevailed throughout the assembly. All who were present by invitation represented a certain order of plutocratic society. Their names were frequent in the lists of fashion ; they set the tone in manners to a considerable section of the less privileged public. The majority being women, a high note of talk and laughter resounded through the building. As time went on, and when it seemed ~~that~~ the opening of the entertainment was somewhat strangely delayed, curiosity increased the polite uproar. People stood up and looked about ; several men unfolded newspapers ; Lord Dunfield caused great amusement by offering his cigarette-case to those near him. At length, nearly half an hour behind time, confused noises near the entrance told that the indispensable persons had arrived. Then occurred a singular incident. All were seated, and only an occasional laugh broke the silence, when a deep, clear voice ~~sounded~~ from the upper end of the church.

‘I must remind the congregation that they are in a place of worship, not in a theatre.’

Some one giggled ; two or three people coughed ; then all were mute. Eyes exchanged glances of amazement. Had clergyman ever before dared to reprove the manners of such a congregation as this ?

Lord Dunfield had much ado to contain his merriment. With every minute of the unexplained delay his spirits had risen ; he was now jubilant, for the visage of the bridegroom convinced him that his plot had not failed ; any one had but to look at the man to see that he was in no wedding-day mood. The bride’s veil undoubtedly concealed a similar perturbation. Moreover, one or two of her relatives wore very dark looks. Lord Dunfield forgot his savage jealousy in delight at his success.

The clerical admonition secured a semblance of decent behaviour throughout the ceremony. When the organ struck up its notes of dismissal, there was a rush for the exit. Lord Dunfield, unfavourably placed for escape, after futile efforts to crush out into the gangway, cried to his companion, ‘Come along, Bob, let’s take the fences.’

And together they vaulted from seat to seat, an exhibition of activity which was facetiously noticed in the society journals next week.

THE LITTLE WOMAN FROM
LANCASHIRE

EVERY ONE laughed at Mrs. Jephson, but only the ill-conditioned laughed unkindly. For all her vanity, it was impossible to dislike her : for all her astonishing *naïveté*, one could not help thinking of her as a clever woman. She did a great many foolish things—perhaps her life in London was one supreme folly ; yet who could deny her social gifts, or fail to understand the temptation which brought her into such strange prominence ? She was no adventuress ; any one who took the trouble could ascertain all about her large income, and how she had inherited it. Plainly, her one desire was to enjoy life, and to see other people sharing in her pleasures. Of scandal, not a word, not a breath. Her husband seldom showed himself, but his absences were most satisfactorily explained ; and people who had seen the two together agreed that there could be no shadow of doubt as to the harmony of their life.

Of course, even Mrs. Jephson did not tell everything. Probably her husband had begun life at the

very bottom of the ladder ; in appearance and talk he still resembled the average Lancashire mill-hand. Of herself, she gossiped freely ; joked about her barefoot childhood in the little moorland town, and mimicked her early modes of speech. No one needed to ask whence she came ; however skilfully she had picked up the language of education, her tongue at once bewrayed her. But she was never heard to make fun of Mr. Jephson. His name was often on her lips, and always with a phrase of affection, admiration, eulogy. 'My husband'—as soon as the words were uttered, one knew what would come. For her, Mr. Jephson's opinion was the final authority ; his wish was law. One could only suppose that the man himself, conscious of deficiencies, chose to keep in the background, satisfied so long as his brilliant wife had all she wanted. It did not seem at all wonderful that he should look on at her social triumphs with the calmness of perfect trust. Mrs. Jephson was childless, by no means ill-favoured, and not yet thirty-five ; but if ever a wife could take care of herself, and if ever one was resolute to walk straight, it was she.

She did not flash of a sudden upon the world that amuses itself. In her first London season she knew very few people, and lived quietly at a first-rate boarding-house. At the close of that year, after foreign travel, she took a large house, and began to entertain. But only the third year of her prosperity

established her as a recognised leader in certain circles of wealth and fashion ; then it was that one began to read so much about her, and to hear her name both above and below the sphere in which she shone. Mrs. Jephson frankly declared that she had now attained the summit of her wishes. She could not aspire to a place among the aristocracy ; enough to be received among 'nice and jolly people'—that was her phrase—and to feel that she was getting 'really good value for her money.' The hearty candour of her egoism forbade one to remember that she had no intellectual aim, and that she seemed not so much indifferent to as utterly oblivious of social problems and miseries. Intensely conservative in her instincts, she lived as though it were her duty to support and enjoy the existing order of things. Reminiscences of her own poverty appeared to inspire her with no sympathy for that of others. One gathered now and then that she felt gratitude to Providence for the care it had taken of her ; but, at the same time, she evidently saw in her promotion a striking example of the fitness of things.

Early in August, Mrs. Jephson left town. It was understood that she had a great round of visits to make. For a month or two, the Society journals chronicled her movements ; then she disappeared, and no one heard anything of her till after Christmas. One day, in a London drawing-room, a lady startled her friends by declaring that Mr. Jephson had filed a

petition of divorce. She had it on the very best authority.

‘Impossible!’ exclaimed another lady present. ‘I called yesterday. A lot of people were there. She was just the same as ever.’

Incredulity was general. No less than three of the company went straight to call upon Mrs. Jephson, whom they found in excellent health and spirits. About a dozen persons were in the drawing-room, and presently they began to form little groups, at a distance from the hostess, talking earnestly in a low voice. Mrs. Jephson, observant, but unconcerned, beckoned a certain young matron to her side.

‘What is it? What were you talking about?’

‘I? Oh—trifles—really I forget.’

‘Oh, no, you don’t. What made you turn red? Tell me at once.’

There was no resisting this Northern bluntness. The lady whispered, ‘Some malicious person has been saying that you—that Mr. Jephson——’

Having heard the rumour, Mrs. Jephson reflected for a moment. Then, glancing round, she saw that many eyes were fixed upon her. Suddenly, she let a teacup fall; it shattered on the floor.

‘A way of getting your attention,’ she exclaimed with a laugh, as the guests turned to look. ‘You’re all talking about the same thing, but you’re all wrong. I may as well let you know the truth. It’s *I* who am the petitioner in a certain case, not my husband.’

There, now we won't talk any more about it ; you'll all know whatever there is to be known before long.'

And not another word was said. Nor, until the public were invited to the feast of scandal, did any one of Mrs. Jephson's fashionable acquaintances learn a single detail of the affair. An acute observer, much interested in the little Lancashire woman, would have it that she had made up her mind not to spoil the effect of Divorce Court revelations ; an artist in her way, she understood the advantage of stimulating curiosity by reticence. This, to be sure, was rather a new reading of Mrs. Jephson's character ; but, judging by subsequent events, there seems to have been something in it. Most likely she enjoyed the universal astonishment. Seeing people as usual (except the few more scrupulous who preferred to hold aloof), she was unlike herself only in the one respect, that she never mentioned her husband.

The case came on ; the story was told. In its main features, so simple a story, that ordinary people were disappointed. Last autumn, while staying at a country house, Mrs. Jephson learnt that her husband was unfaithful to her : he had a working-class mistress somewhere in the North. At once she went to see him ; they quarrelled violently, and Jephson refused to make any change, save on the condition that his wife should relinquish her fashionable career, and live with him away from London. He brought no charge against her ; merely said that her way of

living was distasteful to him—an oft-repeated protest on his part. In the end Mrs. Jephson yielded, and for two or three weeks they dwelt together in retirement. But it was not a success. Discord soon broke out again, and rose to such a point that one night Jephson beat his wife savagely. He then kept her a prisoner in the little country house for several days, until, alarmed by her condition, he was obliged to call in a doctor. This medical man now testified that Mrs. Jephson had suffered gravely; indeed, it was a wonder she had not been lamed for life. A reconciliation being impossible, the husband abruptly took himself off, and rejoined his mistress, with whom he was still living. He did not defend the case.

Well, that was all, and people felt disappointed. Not so the acute observer. 'Think what a wonderful little woman!' he remarked. 'For years she has evidently subdued to her will a man of violent passions, of tremendous character. Plainly she was fond of him. But there came the inevitable moment; she had to choose between him and social success. A year ago she would have yielded in the contest, had it become acute; in the end, ambition carried it. Say, if you like, that the little woman has been spoilt; perhaps so. At all events, the thrashing was too much. She welcomed the opportunity of making a new start in life. Not an ungenerous little woman, you can't say that she took advantage of her position;

all along, it was fair subjugation of will by will. She would never have spoken disloyally of the man, or have tried to get rid of him. But after the thrashing, she would naturally feel "Now we are quits." Probably, she won't be quite what she was ; we shall see.'

Six months later, the *Times* contained this advertisement :

MRS. JEPHSON begs sincerely to thank her friends for sympathy, written and verbal, pending proceedings for dissolution of marriage, in which she, the petitioner, obtained the final decree on the 14th inst.

The acute observer laughed.

IN NO-MAN'S LAND

IT was in the smoking-room of a second-rate commercial hotel. A rakish fellow, newly back from the Colonies, began to abuse England ; he hated a country where there was no free space, where every inch of ground belonged to some landlord or other, where you couldn't live without paying rent——

‘Hold on!’ cried Cogswell, who had done well at the races, and was in merry mood ; ‘there’s people living in England who pay no rent. Yes, living in houses they don’t own, and without any landlord ; houses as haven’t belonged to anybody for no one knows how long.’

‘Go along!’

‘I tell you it’s true. You’d like to know where, wouldn’t you ? Well, the place is in London. I’ll tell you so much, and charge nothing for the information.’

There was a laugh, and Cogswell, who had to catch a train, went off, without saying any more. During the journey to London, he was unusually meditative. An odd thing, he said to himself, that for all these years he had never thought of Peter’s

Passage. The old state of things, perhaps, no longer existed ; yet possibly it did, and, in that case, wasn't it worth thinking about ? How long ago ? Why, he left Peter's Passage, as a lad of ten or so, in '55, and it was now '75. Many changes happen in twenty years. All the same, he would go down East, and have a look.

Since boyhood, his rambling, haphazard life had never led him to that murky corner of East London. Peter's Passage lay in the mid-squalor of a region of small manufactories, and was unknown even to the rent-collector. Seven houses there were, wretched hovels, each containing four rooms. Cogswell remembered that his father, after occupying one of them for a long time, and wishing to remove, sold the *key* of the house for two pounds to another man. He well recollected his father's talk about the business : how, in Peter's Passage, all the occupiers lived rent-free, no one ever having heard of a landlord. Miserable enough, the life of these quasi-freeholders. Old Cogswell occasionally worked at some sort of factory ; now and then he was a costermonger. His children, hungry and in rags, practically supported themselves from the time when they were able to talk ; begging, stealing, doing jobs for neighbours, selling things in the streets. To-day, only one of the family survived, and he, not without reason, regarded himself as a very lucky man, for he had notably risen in the world, often had a pocketful of money, and not

often felt shy of the police. For this Cogswell thanked his own wits, and, to a certain extent, his own honest effort. Had he not laboriously learnt to read and to write? Had he not, long before he was twenty, known a greater variety of occupations, some of them terribly hard, than most men know in a lifetime? Nowadays, he could dress well and eat well, and flattered himself that he looked a gentleman. At all events, he had dealings with many a so-called gentleman who would only be too glad to change places with him.

He sought out Peter's Passage, and saw at a glance that, externally, nothing had been altered. To his changed eyes, it seemed a hideous hole; though not given to sentiment, he stood for a moment pitying the days of his childhood. Assuming a grave important air, he walked the length of the passage—there were houses only on one side, the blank wall of a timber yard on the other—and viewed the buildings. Women in doorways regarded him curiously; he gave them a keen business-like glance. Then, taking out a note-book, he made certain jottings, while a group of children came together to observe him. Finally, he stepped up to the door of the first house; it was open, and a woman confronted him.

‘Who is the occupier of this house?’

‘What’s that to you?’

Cogswell desired to make himself agreeable, and had no difficulty in doing so. Presently he was talk-

ing with a cluster of people, suavely, facetiously ; and though no one would reply in plain terms to a plain question, he learnt that, beyond doubt, Peter's Passage was still occupied by mere squatters, some of whom, apparently, had held their houses for a good many years. All the time, he assiduously made notes in his pocket-book.

'How long'—he looked round at the dirty, haggard faces—'how long is it since you had any repairs done?'

Repairs? The word seemed to be unknown. There was a laugh, and someone spat, as if in disgust, but no voice made answer.

'Can't you understand? When was the houses done up—paint and plaster?'

A palsied old man uttered a squeaking laugh, which the children echoed mockingly. As Cogswell knew without asking, several voices informed him that new paint and plaster were unheard of in Peter's Passage.

'Very well. I shall send my workmen in on Monday morning, and you'll all be put straight. I am the landlord. I shall either come myself or send my agent one day next week, and the occupier of each house will be entered on my books.'

He had played his part very skilfully, and the matter-of-fact tone of these last remarks, authoritative, yet not such as to give offence, made an obvious impression. When he turned away, with a civil 'Good

morning,' no insult was shouted. The group of tatterdemalions stared after him, silent, wonder-stricken. Just as he disappeared round the corner, a faint ray of the April sun gleamed on his silk hat, and this last glimpse of dignity helped to prolong the effect produced by his speech.

Chuckling over that happy idea of the repairs, and all but assured of success if he kept the game up with sufficient audacity, Cogswell lost no time in looking for a small builder who would serve his purpose. He discovered the suitable man—in a district neither too near nor too remote—and held a consultation with him, merely explaining that the property had just come into his hands. In due time he received an estimate of costs, which, when he had cut it down by half, he agreed to accept. And forthwith the job was undertaken. Peter's Passage underwent a tolerable cleaning and patching, of course without disturbance of the tenants, who simply held their tongues. When the work was nearly done, Cogswell came over to inspect, and, on the same occasion, he tried to obtain a list of the occupiers' names; but only in three out of the seven houses was he successful. Never mind, he said to himself, all in good time. It was plain that no one felt able to accuse him of imposture. The rents would soon recoup him for his small outlay; then, for the future, he could count upon a pleasant little sum as weekly

addition to his income. It was a capital idea, and well worth the trouble.

To give the thing a more formal appearance, he arranged with the builder—by name, Smethurst—to act as his agent in collecting rents. Smethurst, as soon as the repairs were finished, delivered at each house a printed notice, making demand of a certain weekly rent, due immediately. As usual in this locality, rents would be collected on Monday, and on Monday afternoon Cogswell, full of hope, kept an appointment with his agent at the latter's place of business.

‘Well, Smethurst? No trouble, had you?’

‘Trouble?’ answered the other with a grin. ‘No, not much trouble. But I got no money, either.’

‘Eh? They won’t pay their rents?’

‘Not a blessed farden! They say they never have done, and they ain’t a-goin’ to begin.’

Cogswell, dark of countenance, made his way to the Passage. He had much ado to refrain from evil language: but, keeping up the show of matter-of-fact procedure, he proclaimed at each house that either rent must be paid or the premises vacated. All he got in return was mocking and defiance. The people did not contest his authority; they merely refused to pay, and bade him do what he would. One man declared that he had occupied the house and paid rates for fifteen years; another

asserted the like status for very nearly as long. Let him try to turn them out ; maybe he wouldn't find it so easy.

The struggle continued for some weeks—if struggle it could be called, where the one side could only employ impotent threats, and the other remained contemptuously passive. Cogswell found he had overreached himself ; there was Smethurst's bill to pay, and no prospect of a penny from the ungrateful tenants whose dwellings he had so generously restored. Had it been possible, he would, of course, have left the builder in the lurch ; but, in his gay confidence, he had allowed Smethurst to get too sure a hold upon him ; if the man sued for his money, the affair might have unpleasant consequences. Cogswell paid, and cursed the home of his childhood.

AT HIGH PRESSURE

‘REALLY, Linda, I do think you might find time to take your meals properly. The idea of writing letters while you’re eating!’

‘I must catch the very first post. There! that comes of fidgeting me.’

Linda had let a great ink-drop fall upon the tablecloth. Mrs. Vassie cried remonstrance in a louder key; the two younger girls were indignant; and their father, scampering over the columns of his newspaper in the few minutes left before he must rush for the train, growled at the noise and confusion. As in the great majority of families raised by paternal effort and the education of children above the lower middle-class degree in which they began, mild domestic discord was natural to the Vassies, especially at breakfast-time. Mr. Vassie declared that it was the cause of his dyspepsia. They did not quarrel with vulgar violence; mother and girls alike had learned to pick their phrases, and to abstain from excessive forms of irritation; but polite wrangling when the family were alone, seldom

ceased, and, as often as not, Linda gave occasion for it.

This young woman led a surprising life. Without the least pretence of preparing herself for any recognised calling—there was no need for her to do so—she exhibited an activity which would have taxed the constitution even of a strong man. From morning to night—often, indeed, till past midnight—Linda was engaged, at high pressure, in a great variety of pursuits. Her correspondence alone represented a day's work for an ordinary person. She wrote to numberless people, public and private, on all manner of subjects. Scarcely a book, magazine, or newspaper came into her hands which did not suggest a letter of inquiry, criticism, or sympathy; her collection of autographs was very large, and she rejoiced loudly over every important addition to it. She attended all sorts of meetings, in town and country, at an expense in railway fares which often excited her father's protest. Her purely social engagements were numerous, and she threw herself into all the common forms of recreation with no less energy than into what she called her 'work.' Full of intellectual and moral self-esteem, she lacked the common form of personal vanity; dress concerned her little, and, since a very early age, she had never been known to betray sensibility to sexual impressions.

Not that Miss Vassie belonged to the advanced

guard of emancipated women : in weighty matters of opinion she was orthodox ; her views of life savoured of provincialism. But for this, it would have been impossible for her to remain a member of the household at Westbourne Park. The forms of religion (ritualistic) she discharged as punctually and conscientiously as any other of her innumerable undertakings ; they had their hours in the methodical scheme which she drew up every Saturday for the ensuing week ; prayers night and morning were 'fitted in'—to use her own constant phrase—with admirable precision ; and a drawing-room meeting on some matter which concerned the spiritual life often appeared in her 'time-table,' exactly wedged between mundane appointments. The cause of 'womanhood' greatly concerned her, but in no revolutionary sense. Herself the least domestic of persons, she maintained the time-honoured theory of female duties. Personally, she seemed to demand nothing but liberty to keep up a state of nervous tension, to speed about in cabs and trains, to read all the periodicals of the day, to make endless new acquaintances, and to receive a score of letters by every post.

Her age was seven-and-twenty ; if anything, she looked younger. After a rather sickly childhood, she had grown into a thoroughly sound state of health, which seemed to demand, and to profit by, astonishing physical activity. Whether she exerted her mind in

a corresponding degree, or at all in proportion to the show she made of mental alertness and application, might reasonably be doubted. The members of her family, though frank in condemnation of her self-will, restlessness, and disputatious temper, never presumed to question Linda's authority on all high matters; they marvelled at her learning, her mental powers. She talked with fluency on most subjects current in the journalism of the day. She professed, and believed, herself a sound critic of every art, with something of special attainment in the sphere of music. She managed to 'fit in' a good many half-hours of solitary study, the subjects varying at very short intervals; one week her zeal would be for the historical aspect of the Eastern Question; the next, she had resolved to learn 'everything' about Egyptology. As she never accused herself of desultoriness, it was to be presumed that she felt satisfied with the brief but vigorous efforts of her acute intelligence. At all times, in whatever company, she spoke at a speed which would have baffled any stenographer, and, when affecting to listen, she was evidently thinking of what she would say next.

Miss Vassie's delight was to make herself the instructress, the spiritual guide, of young girls. Whenever she could gather two or three ingenuous, docile maidens, and speed about London with them on a perspiring intellectual pilgrimage, her satisfaction knew no bounds. It once happened that two country

cousins, good-humoured girls, eager to learn and to enjoy, came to stay with the family at Westbourne Park. From the first day Linda took possession of them, and did not flag in her zeal for their enlightenment until both were so seriously affected in health by the life she led them that Mrs. Vassie had to interfere. At the British Museum, at the National Gallery, she poured forth an inexhaustible stream of commonplaces and inaccuracies; when her hapless companions were all but fainting, the terrible cicerone pushed on from room to room. Linda always lost her disciples by mere excess of energy. Girls grew afraid of her, and at length fled before the sound of her voice.

She belonged to a great many societies, received dozens of reports, proceedings, prospectuses, and the like. Her talk at home was often unintelligible to her hearers owing to her habit of mentioning societies by initials instead of the full name. 'My dear girls, how *can* I go with you when I have a meeting at the S.R.T.M.?' 'Next week I shall be fearfully busy. There's the A.L.P.Q., and the S.R.D.B., and—— Oh! do let me make a note of a letter I have to write to the secretary of the L.Q.C.E.W.!' These alphabetical designations rolled off her tongue with astounding volubility.

Her desire to form intimacies with people of name sometimes led her into an unpleasant situation. Civil coldness did not discourage her, and to the

hints which would have rebuffed a sensitive woman she was, happily, obtuse. But on one occasion accident gave her something more than a hint to abstain from assiduities in a certain quarter. A lady with a mission, an advocate of 'womanhood,' after Linda's own heart, had allowed herself to be drawn into correspondence, and at length invited Miss Vassie to call upon her. For some weeks Linda boasted of the acquaintance. Then came a letter addressed in the well-known hand, and Linda opened it with eagerness. To her surprise it began, 'My dear Miss Jones.' Here was a mistake. The lady with a mission, no less busy than Linda herself, had in her haste misdirected the envelope. But it did not occur to Linda to fold the sheet without reading its contents, and her curiosity had its reward.

'MY DEAR MISS JONES,—I should have written to you yesterday, but just as I sat down I was worried by a call from a most trying and wearisome person, who talked and talked for more than an hour about her own silly, half-educated ideas. Do beware of her if she writes to you ; it is a Miss Vassie of Westbourne Park—oh, a dreadful person ! She seems to write to everybody. I think it a duty to warn my friends, and somehow I shall have to get rid of her.'

Then followed matter of no particular interest. Linda, hot and trembling, presently asked herself

whether this *was* a mistake. She sent back the letter without a word, and never again heard from that distinguished lady—of whom, when she spoke at all, she spoke with an exceeding bitterness which no one could understand.

A CONVERSION

NINETY-ONE was Klimper's calamitous year. For a time he had lived very comfortably in Belgium, making a larger income than ever before, and with much less exertion ; at five-and-forty he began to look forward to a peaceful retirement in one of the genteel English towns, such as Bath or Leamington, which had always attracted him. Then, of a sudden, Belgium cast him forth : he, and others like him, were forbidden to practise their profession on the hitherto hospitable soil. Flurried by this catastrophe, Klimper made a precipitate 'deal' in booming shares, the end of which was again disastrous. And just upon the close of the year, when he felt himself very cruelly hit, came the illness which kept him on his back for months.

While in hospital, he doubtless meditated not a little on the aspects of life ; probably this time of suffering and forced inactivity must be taken into account when one comes to the events of a year or two later. But Klimper was at no time a thoughtless or vulgar-minded man ; blackguard, gambler, book-maker, he never typified his class. As he drew

towards middle age a certain gravity appeared in his speech, countenance, and manners—a placid, almost benevolent decorum, strangely at variance with his ways of making a living. Possibly the traits of some very respectable ancestor slowly worked to the surface, transforming him alike in body and in mind. It is no uncommon thing for a man to develop in this way long after the period of ordinary growth. Klimper at five-and-forty had so notably changed from the Klimper of ten years before that an old acquaintance, suddenly coming across him, would with difficulty have recognised the man.

However, when he rose from his sick-bed, he evinced no anxiety to begin a reformed life. It was even with a certain gusto that he returned to the turf and the gaming-table. But accident put in his way an opportunity of blending old experience and dexterity with an honourable function not at all distasteful to that side of his character which hitherto had been obscured. Happening to watch a game of cards at a certain proprietary club, he became aware that one of the players was cheating, and doing it so cleverly that no one else even suspected the fraud. The club proprietor being a friend of his, Klimper spoke to him in private of this matter, and was thanked for his pains. More than that, it was suggested to him that he should become, by secret appointment, protector of fair play in his friend's interest. The club had a good name; its founder

was resolved to keep it 'respectable'; and who more competent than Klimper to keep an eye on suspicious persons, to play discreet detective in the card-room? Terms were agreed upon, and Klimper assumed his office.

He discharged it with wonderful zeal and success. A score of years spent among gamblers of every species, in many parts of the world, had rendered him familiar with all the refinements of blackleg ingenuity; he had but to watch and to spot his man. At the same time, his dignity of person, his sober speech, his admirable tact in delicate situations, safeguarded him against unfavourable notice from the members of the club. At this time he allowed his beard to grow, and it assumed a grizzled amplitude sufficient in itself to inspire respect and confidence. It might well be that a sense of judicial authority, of power exercised in defence of truth and honour, subtly affected his whole being. He was still a betting-man, but not as formerly; his transactions were performed in strict privacy, and he never spoke of them. At the club, though facilities of gain constantly appealed to him, he played very little, and never exerted himself to win. Disreputable habits lost their savour for him; he found it comparatively easy to live on a modest income, and grew indifferent to his aims of only a year or two ago.

Naturally, he had no sinecure. Respectability and gaming for coin are not very congruous characteristics

of a proprietary club. Again and again the bland detective smiled at his prescient skill when some gentleman whom no one else would have mistrusted condemned himself under that remorseless scrutiny. And there was never any scandal; a great part of Klimper's office consisted in the avoidance of such unpleasant necessity. He waited his occasion, perhaps for a few minutes, perhaps for some days. Then the gentleman whose proceedings could not be tolerated found himself, he scarce knew how, in pleasant, frank colloquy, of the most private nature, with the other gentleman so honourably distinguished by his grizzled beard. Such conversations were never long, and they always had a satisfactory issue. In general, the fraudulent gambler disappeared. If another chance were granted him, he very rarely abused Mr. Klimper's lenience.

In one member of the club Klimper felt a strong interest. This was a good-looking and gay young fellow, supposed to be very well off and to have excellent prospects. He played a good deal, and with a proficiency which made Klimper uneasy. He drank, too, and club-gossip associated his name with that of a lady whose influence over him could hardly be maternal. Klimper tried now and then to put himself on terms of closer acquaintance with this young man, but unsuccessfully. Feeling, in a strange way, that his experience, his character, might be invaluable as a protection to one whom he

instinctively liked, and who was in obvious need of guidance, the ex-gambler, ex-blackguard, had no choice but to keep aloof and anxiously observe the course of things. Before long he knew that the case professionally concerned him. Yet he did not act ; for the first time he had a difficulty in deciding how he should proceed. Again the young man betrayed himself to the unsuspected observer, and now duty called aloud. After five minutes' troubled reflection, Klimper took his measures. With unusual difficulty he procured a private interview. It was more painful than he had foreseen, and it lasted for an hour.

The evening papers of next day announced that this young man had committed suicide. He must have done it as soon as possible after leaving the club. Klimper did not allow it to be known that the poor fellow went away, for good reasons, in a mood of shame and desperation ; nor did he like to remember what had passed in that private room.

A few weeks later, the grave gentleman with the long beard chanced to pass by a public hall where, as was announced by posters at the door, someone or other would that evening address young men on the subject of betting. He stood a while in meditation. When the hour came, he had returned ; he sat among the audience (or congregation, for the proceedings had a religious character), and listened very attentively. This occasion marked the turning-

wrote, not at great length, nor very legibly, but in a strain which doubtless inspired Jonas with his great idea. Half the letter dealt with details not suitable for publication, and over this portion Jonas lingered with many guffaws. Altogether, it was a stirring summons. It bade the rustic shake the mud off his heels, turn his back for ever on the—unprintable—country, and enter into the joys of London.

This had been Jonas Clay's ambition ever since he left school. At school he had learnt—well, what had he learnt? In the main, to spell out police news and to scrawl obscene words. His education, in the real sense, he owed to a powerful but unacknowledged instructor, the Spirit of the Age. Hence his discontent with everything about him, his thorough dishonesty, his blurred, gaslight vision of a remote world. Certain well-meaning persons had given him 'religious teaching,' that is to say, had laboriously brought him to the repetition of phrases he did not understand, to which he attached no particular significance whatever. He could not name the flowers by the wayside; no one had ever thought of teaching him that. He did not know—he did not hear—the bird that sang to him at his work; no one had ever spoken to him of such trifles. He was aware, by consequences, that the sun rose and set; but never had he consciously looked at its setting or its rising; for all that Jonas thought about it, the sky might have lowered in a perpetual leadenness. He had no conception of

geography—save that somewhere vaguely to the east lay a huge town called London. Of the men who had lived and wrought before him in this fruitful English county he knew no more than of the Assyrians. Field and farmyard, hedgerow and highway, were hateful in his eyes, to be described only by a foul epithet. Old enough to do a man's work, he had nothing of a man's pride in it ; no sense of a man's duties and lawful claims ; no impulse of manhood save the fleshly.

Tenacious of his purpose, Jonas, when next he received his wages, hid the money away. He made no declaration of independence ; instead of refusing to pay his mother as usual he merely put her off with absurd excuses. Of course, there was wrangling in the cottage, but Jonas had sound nerves. Presently when his slow wit contrived the subterfuge, he gave out that he had been incurring debts, and that he would get into trouble if he did not pay them off. For a second and a third week he sat stolid under his mother's wrath and menaces. Then he could wait no longer. It seemed to him that he had amassed a fortune. Early one morning he unearthed his savings, stealthily put together a small bundle, and, instead of going to work, made for the nearest railway station.

In London, he with difficulty gaped his way to the address with which he had been supplied by Bill Saggars. Bill, as it happened, was taking a holiday, and many hours passed before his friend met with

him. After pacing a street and sitting on door-steps, until he suffered more from fatigue than ever in his life, Jonas beheld a young man whose appearance confounded him ; his fellow-yokel of old time had changed amazingly in face and in costume—nay, even in language ; Jonas could hardly understand many of his phrases, and some of his words not at all.

It was eleven at night. They went together to a public-house, and while drinking at his friend's expense Bill bestowed upon the new-comer a great deal of advice and instruction. First of all, Jonas must provide himself with the garb of civilization, not, of course, superior garments such as Bill was at present wearing, but something altogether different from rustic attire : at a slop-shop in the neighbourhood a few shillings would rig him out. And work ? Oh, yes ! no doubt work could be found easily enough by inquiring at the mews and such places. But never mind about work just yet. Bill felt in the mind to take another day off ; to-morrow he would show his friend about.

‘ How did you get the coin ? ’ he inquired genially. ‘ No coppers after you ? ’

When the suggestion was explained to him, Jonas indignantly protested his innocence. Bill felt a doubt, but laughed the matter aside.

That night the countryman paid fourpence for his bed at a common lodging-house, and as soon as

possible next morning he exchanged his earth-soiled garb for a suit which made him feel very proud of himself; it looked almost as good as new. Bill Saggars, true to his word, turned up in festive spirit, and they devoted the day to sight-seeing. Jonas made the acquaintance of so many gorgeous public-houses that he had soon lost count of them, and before dusk the marvels of London seemed to him to be floating and circling on a tide of mixed beverages. Somehow he quarrelled with Bill Saggars, and fought him. Somehow, later, he made love to a joyous being in a hat with an immense blue feather. At bedtime he had no money left, but that did not matter; the lordly London police took Jonas into their care, and provided him with shelter. On the morrow, though he declared that he was dying, his protectors obliged him to make a public appearance, but only for a few minutes. Then Jonas was again established in a lodging—where he abode very quietly for seven days.

His courage a trifle damped, but with no thought whatever of leaving the brilliant city, Jonas Clay again sought his friend, and, after a day or two of starvation, he obtained a rough job, which supported him for several weeks. Then came an episode in his story on which it is not good to dwell. Sufficient that he fell into bad health, and, from that, into worse. Now working, now starving, he suffered several months of base torment, which ended, at length, in a

hospital. When he came forth again his constitution was wrecked. But, by this time, he knew London, and had not much difficulty in finding employment. Nothing would have induced him to return to rural life; the smell of the pavement was very sweet in his nostrils, and he loathed the memory of the fields. Just think—so he often said—of what he had learnt since he came to London!

Jonas was not marked for a career of crime. One experience had given him a wholesome dread of the police, and though at all times he would have lived dishonestly had it come easily within his scope, he felt no inclination to consort with criminals or study their profession. Enough, that for every penny he could earn London offered an unmatched penny-worth of enjoyment. In course of time, and again, perhaps, as result of experience, his emotions grew susceptible of the calmer, tenderer delights; Jonas awoke to the charm of London's sweet domestic maidenhood, and from among the shining multitude he chose unto himself a suitable companion. The courtship lasted for three years, and in the meantime he improved his position, until an income of five-and-twenty shillings a-week seemed to him and to his beloved the augury of legitimate happiness.

Just before his marriage Jonas wrote to the mother he had so long forgotten. The letter began, 'How goes it, old woman?' In a few days it was

returned to him, marked by the Post Office, 'Dead.' Jonas was so much surprised that he laughed.

Five years of marriage made him the father of three children, miserable, puny creatures, burdened with an unutterable curse. But neither on this part of the story is it pleasant to dwell.

OUT OF THE FASHION

‘How shall I tell her?’ the man said to himself, on his way homeward. ‘How the devil shall I tell her?’

He reached his home at Tufnell Park, entered as usual, and found the customary quietude, the familiar atmosphere of well-being, of security, of order. There would be guests at dinner this evening; he must keep up his countenance till he and Mary were alone and the house hushed.

Mary met him at the head of the stairs; her wonted smile, her silence that was all-sufficient. He asked after the baby, and received a word or two of satisfactory information. Then Mary smiled again, and passed on to dress for dinner.

It was a pleasant evening, and such as they often enjoyed. Only two friends, people of their own standing, well-to-do, but unpretentious. Mary’s music, always a great resource; her husband’s thoroughly good-natured, far from brilliant, talk. No niggardliness, no display. Mary knew how to manage these things. Then they were alone, and the night before them.

‘Mary, there’s bad news. I may as well out with

it at once ; but it's the hardest job I ever had in my life.'

No exclamation. She stood, with nerves strung, and looked steadily at him. Assuredly it was not a pleasant thing to make known. Appointed, a year and a half ago, manager of a department in a great house of business, Claxton had fallen short of the expectations of the firm. The appointment, to begin with, had surprised as much as it delighted him ; he knew that he owed it to personal favour ; the head of the firm, an amiable old gentleman, friendly to him since his childhood, had given him this great chance. And, for a time, not unnaturally, Claxton seemed to rise to the demands upon him. He was an exultant man ; the advancement had enabled him to marry ; great happiness lifted him above himself. But his old patron very soon died, and Claxton became aware that the new order of things was not quite favourable to him. Month after month he had struggled hard, allowing no one to suspect his mortifications and his fears. Now the blow had fallen. He was under notice to resign his position, and—what would become of him ?

He told it in a few shamefaced words, the mere humiliating truth ; to his wife he could not do otherwise. And Mary drew a sigh of relief.

' Oh, I thought, from your face, it was something dreadful !'

' And don't you think it so ?'

‘It’s very hard for *you*, dear.’

There was silence. Then they talked things over as quietly as usual. And for many days the conversation was resumed, always cheerfully on Mary’s part, until at length a resolve had been taken.

The Claxtons left London, and began a new life in a Northern town. Mary had now a much smaller house, and much more to do in it. Her second child was born. Happily, she had not been brought up in the world of limitless leisure; she was not very highly educated, though native intelligence made her seem superior in that respect to her husband; when it became necessary to lay aside books and music, and to do much of the work which servants had hitherto done for her, the spirit was willing and the flesh did not fail. Her smile lost nothing of its sweet loyalty; her words—weighed as women’s seldom are—had all the old, quiet cheerfulness.

Then Claxton received at the hands of destiny his second chance. He was enabled, and encouraged by Mary, to begin business on his own account. He looked up once more, recovered the note of hopefulness. When a third child was born to him, he felt justified in removing to a better house. And Mary’s music presently sounded again.

But in secret he could not trust himself, and, as time went on, he had more and more reason for the heavy countenance, the long, dark broodings, which he carefully concealed from his wife. Upon fear

followed rashness ; then came the second, the more grievous, downfall.

Again in a strange place, and in poorer circumstances than she had ever known, Mary shed about her the light of home. She had now to battle for her children's future. The father might do his best to earn their livelihood ; upon the mother lay a more difficult duty. Hers to guard them from the degrading effects of manifest poverty : to foster, by ceaseless thought and imaginative effort, the self-respect of the little ones : to hold their minds above the slough of base necessity : to supply from the riches of her own heart so much that the world denied. The help of one servant—often enough hindrance rather than help—was all she could now afford. Her strength failed not, but it was more severely tried than her husband ever imagined. No merry holidays ; no social relaxation ; once a year, at most, the brief change of air without which her children could hardly live. Work of the hardest, the most exhausting to mind and body, from early morning till the hour when her husband came home. But evening was sacred. Mary knew that man cannot live by bread alone ; not hers to brutalise the bread-winner by denying him his hour of mental rest. She could not play to him—there was no piano ; but sometimes she sang, keeping her voice very low and soft, that the sleeping children might not be disturbed.

She bore another child, but it only breathed and passed away. Then Mary lay in the valley of the deep shadow, and for many days her husband was chill with fear. Once, opening the Bible as he sat by her bedside—but only for his own comfort as Mary could not hear—he came by chance upon the last chapter of Proverbs and saw the words:

‘She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.’

Then the man’s strength was broken, and his head fell, and he choked with sobs.

It passed. Mary again moved about the house, shedding the light of home. Again she taught her children and toiled for them, and did not lack her reward. Slowly Claxton’s position was once more improving; he had no brilliant prospects, but, as the years went by, things needful came to him in larger measure. The children could attend a good school, and the eldest of them, a boy, could presently be put in the way of a not too humble life. The lad knew whom he should thank for advantages far greater than fall to the lot of many rich men’s sons.

‘Now, don’t trouble about me any more, mother,’ he said, not long after. ‘If I ever give you a day’s anxiety that I can help—well, just look straight at me, and I shall know what to think of myself.’

She sits there, with thin face, with silent-smiling

lips, type of a vanishing virtue. Wife, housewife, mother—shaken by the harsh years, but strong and peaceful in her perfect womanhood. An old-fashioned figure, out of harmony with the day that rules, and to our so modern eyes perhaps the oddest of the whole series of human odds and ends.



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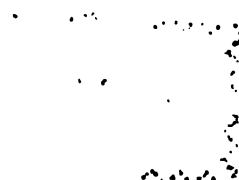
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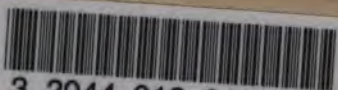
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